

Al-Adl wal-Ihsan: An Explanation of its Rise and its Strategy for Social and Political Reform in Morocco

**Submitted by Abdelouahad Motaouakal to the University of Exeter
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Abstract

This study examines the rise of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* in the early 1980s, its development, its attitude towards a number of Islamic and contemporary issues, and its strategy to take root in society and press for social and political reform in Morocco. The aim is to provide an account that reflects as far as possible what is perceived to be the true nature of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* and, more importantly, to identify the factors behind its rapid growth and its ability to become the largest organized Islamic force in the country despite operating under an authoritarian regime and in an environment already populated by several Islamic groups. Drawing on the dialogic model of interpretation which entails, among things, presenting the Islamists' ideas, experiences and arguments using their own terms and categories, this study has used a wide range of primary and secondary sources and benefited from interviews with a variety of people, including the movement's founding leader, Sheikh Yassine, before he passed away on 13th December 2012, in order to achieve a better understanding of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*.

The major findings that come from this research demonstrate that *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* is a mere response, among others, based on Islamic sources and *ijtihad*, to legitimate demands of social, political and moral order. Hence, to exclude the moral and spiritual dimension from the analysis would not help to generate plausible explanations of the rise and nature of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* or any other Islamic group for that matter. As for al-Adl's rapid expansion, it has been found to be closely related to five basic factors: a charismatic leadership, an adequate organizational structure, a coherent theoretical framework, an appealing reform strategy and special emphasis on *tarbiya* [education]. Thus what becomes of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* in the future seems to depend on its ability to maintain, if not to improve on what is deemed to be the source of its strength, which is a big challenge.

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Acknowledgements

When I first went to the University of Exeter to attend a Graduate School PhD induction day, I had a short conversation with a professor who asked me, “Why do you want to do a PhD?” “For the love of knowledge,” I replied. He laughed and I laughed too. He probably did not expect that someone would be willing to go through all the throes of academic research for that reason only, and he was not totally wrong. Other PhD students and people that I made the acquaintance of soon after were even more surprised when they learnt that I was father of five and also grandfather of six and that by embarking on this thesis, I was not seeking any job promotion, nor did I intend to start a new career.

If that is the case, what on earth are the reasons behind a project that I had to sweat a lot to complete on time? Two basic reasons were decisive. The first lies in my answer to the question above, though some people may not readily believe it. It is not the first time that I engage in a programme of study without having the intention to enter a new profession or to attain a particular social status. Early in the 1980s, three years after I got a BA in English Language and Literature, I started a degree in Arabic and Islamic studies which unfortunately I could not complete because of a stupid decision –believe it or not– taken by the Moroccan Ministry of Education barring all teachers from pursuing higher studies! As I was a teacher at the time bound by an eight-year contract of service with the Ministry, the only option left was to continue studying on my own.

When in 2002 an opportunity to go to UK to pursue higher studies presented itself, I seized it and completed an MA in Politics at Warwick University. There I became aware of the dearth of studies about the Moroccan Islamic landscape. Since then the idea to make some contribution, however modest it may be, to fill up what seemed to be a glaring gap in the English-speaking academia haunted me, but for

mainly financial reasons I had to wait for nearly nine years before I could come back but to carry out only part of my original plan. I found out that to conduct a study of all the Islamic groups in Morocco is rather daunting, and so I decided to focus on the case of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* in the hope that I would have the opportunity to come to other groups later on.

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Acronyms

AH	After <i>Hijra</i> (the Islamic calendar)
AI	Amnesty International
AI-Adl	<i>Al-Adl wal-Ihsan</i> (Justice and Spirituality Movement [JSM])
FAR	<i>Forces Armées Royal</i> (Royal Armed Forces)
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MGC	Member of the Guidance Council
MUR	Movement of Unity and Reform (<i>Harat at-Tawhid wal-Islah</i>)
NDI	National Democratic Institute
PGSU	<i>Partie de la Gauche Socialiste Unifié</i> (Party of the United Socialist Left)
PJD	<i>Parti de la Justice et du Développement</i> (Party of Justice and Development)
PPS	<i>Parti du Progres et du Socialisme</i> (Parti of Progress and Socialism)
TI	Transparency International
UMT	<i>Union Marocaine du Travail</i> (Moroccan Labour Union)
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFP	<i>Union National des Forces Populaires</i> (National Union of Popular Forces)
USFP	<i>Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires</i> (Socialist Union of Popular Forces)
SAP	Structural Ajustment Programme

Chapter 1 Introduction: The Rise of *AL-Adl wal-Ihsan* and the Need for an Explanation

1.1 Introduction

In September 1981, about a dozen people headed by a former school inspector, Abdessalam Yassine, set up an Islamic association which they called *Usrat-al-Jamaa*¹ [The Group], a name which reflected a desire to remain open to other possible forms of organization and cooperation to better serve, in their view, the cause of Islam and press for the social and political reform that the Moroccan people had been awaiting for so long. It was a modest initiative in an environment far from supportive, to say the least, by a small number of people, most of whom worked in the educational sector and who, apart from Sheikh Yassine, were hardly known even in the cities in which they lived. Yet, this small association of *Usrat al-Jamaa*, which later changed its name to *Jamaat al-Adl wal-Ihsan* [Justice and Spirituality Movement], succeeded within the span of less than two decades to become “the biggest and the best organized Islamic movement in the country.”² How did this rapid growth occur?

It may be argued that we are here referring to the 1970s and the 1980s and, as is well known, it was during this period that the Arab and Islamic world witnessed the rise of an unprecedented wave of Islamic groups in its modern history, especially after the remarkable Afghan resistance to the Soviet invasion and the success of the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran to topple the despotic regime of the Shah. Thus, so runs the argument, it should come as no surprise that the movement of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* [*al-Adl*] could rise to prominence so rapidly.

This argument would be appealing if *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* had been alone at the time, with no competitors in the land. The reality is that it was not. Some Islamic groups had been in place much before the foundation of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, that is, since the 1960s and early 1970s, while others came into being either at about the same time

or soon after. Among these groups we may cite *Jam`iyat al-Ba`th al-Islami* [the Association of Islamic Resurrection] which was founded at the beginning of the 1970s by Ismail al-Khatib, a religious scholar and member of the League of Moroccan Scholars since 1968; the *Jam`iyat ash-Shabiba al-Islamiya al-Maghribiya* [The Moroccan Islamic Youth Association], founded in 1968 by a former school inspector called Abdekarim Motii who went into exile in 1975 after the alleged implication in the assassination of a prominent leftist leader, Omar Benjelloun; *Jam`iyat ad-Da`wa al-Islamiya* [the Islamic Call Association] which was founded in Fez in 1976 by some university teachers including Abdessalam al-Harras, ash-Shahad al-Boushikhi and others; *Al-Jam`iya al-Islamiya* [the Islamic Association] which started in al-Kasr al-Kabir in 1976 under the leadership of Ahmed Raissouni before his group and other groupings got united and founded *Rabitat al-Mustakbal al-Islami* [the League of Islamic Future] in 1994; *al-Jama`a Islamiya* [the Islamic Group] was another important association founded in 1983 by Abdilah Benkirane before merging with Raissouni's group into *at-Tawhid wal-Islah* [Unity and Reform].³

This is not to mention some groupings which had been operating underground in big cities like Casablanca, Marrakech, Tangier, Agadir..., nor others which came to the open later such as *Hizb al-Umma* [The *Umma* Party] and *al-Badil al-Hadari* [The Civilizational Alternative], nor other Islamic associations which, though apolitical, had been very active such as *Jama`at at-Tabligh* [Society for the Propagation of Islam], an offshoot of the well-known India-based *Tabligh Jama`at* movement, which found its way to Morocco in July 1975.⁴ The question, then, is: how did Yassine's movement get established in such a burgeoning Islamic environment and achieve in so short a time high popularity and a large membership?

Unlike most other Islamic groups in Morocco which were tolerated, the Moroccan regime's attitude towards Yassine's movement was and is still far from friendly. From the early days of its foundation, it has been subject to various forms of harassment and numerous campaigns of arrests, culminating in the incarceration of many of its members for periods ranging from a few days at the police station to

many long years in prison.⁵ Yet the movement continued steadily its course, attracting more, not less, supporters and sympathizers and maintaining all the while its organizational as well as its intellectual cohesiveness. How has it managed to cope with three decades of continuous, albeit varied in intensity and scope, repression?

According to one theory which is quite common even within some academic circles, the “secret” lies in the leader of the movement whose famous open letter, *Al-Islam aw at-Tufan* [Islam or the Deluge] to the late king Hassan II, a few years before starting organized action, had made history.⁶ In the mean time, proponents of this theory argue that though such a feature constitutes one of the major strengths of the movement, it is also one of its major weaknesses. The reason is that a group centred around a charismatic figure like Sheikh Yassine is likely to thrive as long as he is alive, but the moment he disappears, the whole edifice may be shaken by the struggle over the issue of succession or because of some dormant internal contradictions.⁷ Something of the sort has happened to many organizations, Islamic as well as secular, and there is no reason why *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* should not submit to the same logic.

On 13th December 2012, Sheikh Yassine passed away. It was indeed a hard moment for the movement and its sympathizers who turned up the following day in thousands from all over the country as well as from different parts of the world to form one the biggest spontaneous funeral processions in post-independence Morocco.⁸ A new era which the Moroccan regime had waited for so long seemed to have started now that their arch foe is no more. However, neither what the Moroccan regime had expected nor what the theory referred to above had predicted occurred, so far at least. Within less than ten days the *Shura* Council of the movement was summoned for an extraordinary session, introduced a few amendments to its internal laws and elected a new head for *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*. It seems that the movement passed the first test smoothly and, compared to what often happens to many political organizations, it could be said it is no small feat, and not the sole one. With regard to its organizational capacities, its attitudes and its strategies at the theoretical as well as the practical level, the movement has

been able to register some achievements the importance and implications of which, in all fairness, cannot be denied and needs to be investigated. In a word, what factors could possibly lie behind such achievements and, more importantly, the appeal that *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* has sustained over the last thirty years? These are some of the questions this thesis sets out to explore.

1.2 The focus of this thesis

It is important to note that despite the fact that *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* is considered the biggest Islamic force in Morocco whose influence has even crossed the borders of the country and is being increasingly felt among the Muslim *Magribi* communities in the West, very little research has been done to understand this Moroccan experience. Apart from few attempts which could be counted on the fingers of one hand, there is not, as far as I know, a single study in English which has solely focused on *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* and conducted an in-depth examination.⁹ Even in those serious endeavours that this author is aware of, only a very limited space is devoted to the discussion of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, which is not sufficient for the understanding of such an influential movement. Some writings, besides their failure to come to grips with this issue, have participated, wittingly or unwittingly, to obscure it even further. A number of errors have been incurred: some have to do with the time and circumstance in which the research was carried out; some relate to access to reliable sources and how they should be handled, whereas others have to do with the Arabic language in which most, if not all, of the major sources are written. Worse still is that to overcome such obstacles, some writers submitted to the easiest option, that is, to consider the subject through the lens of others whose declared antagonism and bias cannot be very helpful to produce an academic piece worthy of note.¹⁰

There is yet another possible reason which might explain, in part at least, why the whole issue of Islamism in Morocco, and not only *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, has not received the attention it deserves from English speaking researchers, leaving thereby a glaring gap in the English scholarly literature dealing with the Arab and Muslim world. According to an assumption what is called “political Islam” or

“Islamic fundamentalism” or whatever to refer to the contemporary Islamic resurgence should be rather viewed as a monolithic phenomenon, and to seek to differentiate between its components does not serve any academic purpose. The Islamic groups are all basically the same.¹¹ They draw on the same ideological sources and have the same objectives, namely to revive “the Golden Age” of the Islamic history and to establish a theocratic system of rule reminiscent of they what they term *Khilafa ar-Arashida* [Rightly-Guided Caliphate]. Therefore, any group picked up for investigation would be very representative of the whole lot.¹² If this is the case, then it is not surprising that most studies should focus on the Middle East. Though some practical reasons are not to be excluded, some may assume that what goes for Egypt or Jordan or any other Middle Eastern country is also valid for Morocco.

Putting aside how the Islamic movements are being portrayed and how much reflects the reality or the myth, it is wrong to lump them all into a single category and treat them as such, as if there is no significant differences between them. This blanket approach, though not supported by all scholars, which puts all Islamic groups in the same basket is sure to lead to gross errors and false perceptions. It is true that they do share some common features, but it is equally true that there exist differences not only across the Muslim countries but also among those within the same country. Even within what is termed the mainstream Islamic trend, there may be significant nuances. Thus, to thrust extremist views which have always existed and will continue to exist in all religions, cultures and civilizations with moderate perspectives would not facilitate comprehension but rather hinder it unnecessarily, unless there is some special interest in promoting misunderstanding!

This thesis has a main purpose and a secondary one. The main purpose is to provide an explanation of the rise of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* and try to identify the factors behind the strong appeal it has steadily sustained within the Moroccan society over the last three decades. The question is all the more interesting because, as we have seen, when *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* was set up, the Moroccan Islamic landscape had already been populated with various Islamic associations founded by

respected scholars or well-educated Moroccan activists. It could not be said therefore that *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* rose to prominence just because Islamism was in vogue at the time and there was no other competitors in the land, nor could it be claimed that just because Abdessalam Yassine was a prominent opposition figure to the then monarch of Morocco, Hassan II, that the movement's expansion was achieved rapidly. Yassine was not the only critical voice of the monarchy. There were other well known figures, religious and secular, who were also outspoken in their criticism of the monarchical rule. Why should they not have garnered at least as much support as Yassine did?

The core argument of this thesis is that *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* must have some distinctive features that could account for its public appeal and for the achievements it has proved capable of. By examining the emergence of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, its development, organization, its intellectual attitudes and its preferred strategies, both at the theoretical as well as at the practical level, to contribute to social and political reform in Morocco, this thesis seeks to unravel many ambiguities and to discover where those features lie. It will try to demonstrate whether the vision and outlook of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* represent an adequate response to the people's needs at the political as well as at the moral and spiritual level. The secondary aim of this thesis is to challenge a number of assumptions such as the ones referred to above and to clarify many "gray zones" which have so far been the source of no small amount of misunderstanding of the Islamic resurgence in general and *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* in particular. Meanwhile, some definitions and clarifications are in order.

1.3 Definitions and clarifications

The contemporary Islamic movement has been given a variety of names and described by various epithets: Islamic resurgence, revival, political Islam, fundamentalism, radical, moderate or extremist Islamism, Islamic traditionalism, conservatism, fanaticism, obscurantism and many more. Most of these terms are not of its own invention but created and disseminated by foreign academia and media and only few can lay claim to an indigenous origin. However, not all of these

labels reflect an ideological bias or condemnation. Whereas some are used to describe what is considered to be “the obscurantism of a bygone age,”¹³ others appear to represent an attempt to come to terms with a phenomenon that seemed to have caught many analysts by surprise. Whatever the case might be and whatever the reasons behind the proliferation of such a variety of labels, the policy adopted in this thesis and in conformity with the approach to be explained below is to avoid those considered inadequate in reflecting the nature and objectives of the contemporary movements, though they may be used by respected scholars, as well as those which are believed to be unacceptable or even offending. Meanwhile, in an attempt to disentangle what looks like a bewildering maze of terms, some clarification will be supplied here.

A core concept used in this thesis which needs to be defined is “Islamic movement”. As is usually the case with definitions, it is not easy to find one that cannot be challenged, especially if the phenomenon in question is so diverse and complex like the Islamic movement. However, this has not precluded many from the attempt to say what is, or should be, meant by the term. For Abdulwahhab El-Affendi, a London-based writer and academic, “The term... is used to refer to those groups that are active in the political arena and call for the application of Islamic values and laws in the private and public sphere.”¹⁴ This definition may be in need of further refinement and taking into account the various attempts in this respect, I would propose the following:

The concept “Islamic movement” is a term that may be applied to any organized Islamic group that seeks to reconstruct society and government through peaceful means, from a reasoned perspective, based on the agreed Islamic sources, that understands Islam as a comprehensive way of life, taking into consideration the ever changing circumstances.

This means that those groups that are not engaged politically such as Sufi orders, or those that believe that violence is an inevitable means to achieve their objectives, or those that take the form of Islamic, cultural or socio-economic associations or Islamic charities are not included in this definition.

Though the suggested definition has tried to highlight the salient features of what is generally believed to be “an Islamic movement”, some may consider it to be unnecessarily very narrow and argue that there is no reason why other groups, albeit apolitical, should not come under the same category. They may serve, from their perspectives, the Islamists’ objectives in a manner not to be underestimated. If those who are engaged politically may be the spearhead or the “vanguard”, to borrow from Sayed Qotb’s terminology, of the Islamic trend, the other groups can promote the supportive environment where the success of Islam would be achievable. In some accounts they are regarded as the “strategic reserve” of the Islamic resurgence in the sense that if, for one reason or another, the Islamists operating under authoritarian regimes are harassed or even suppressed, the flow of the Islamic current will be maintained.¹⁵ Thus, if Islamic resurgence is not possible top-down, it will continue “creeping”, to use Kepel’s words, from the bottom.¹⁶ Why should they be set aside then? They are equally entitled to be put under the same title, if only to represent “variety within unity”.

What is at issue here, however, is not to evaluate or to downplay the activities of the other groups,¹⁷ but rather to take, for the purpose of analysis, the position held by mainstream Islamic movements which maintains that an integrated Islamic approach entails that the political dimension is a crucial component and consequently should be given due attention. Furthermore, to seek a comprehensive reform of society and government without getting fully involved in politics is like engaging in wishful thinking. No one can deny the importance that the state in the modern era has acquired and the role it plays in the implementation of political programmes and socio-economic reforms. Hence, the insistence on the political aspect is not considered just an Islamic requirement but a practical necessity.

It is true that some Muslim thinkers have expressed concern about the increasing emphasis on the political aspect on the grounds that it may expose the contemporary Islamic movement to the risk of being sapped of its spiritual vitality and vigor. Khurshid Ahmed, a Pakistani economist, is one among others, who has raised this point stressing that it should not be forgotten that the Islamic movement

is “primarily a religious and ethical movement,” and although it is concerned with political matters, “it is mainly an effort to strengthen the *Iman* [belief]” and to reaffirm the Muslims’ commitment to God.” Khurshid goes on to regret that most Western literature on the subject of Islamic movements should ignore these basic characteristics.¹⁸ Khurshid does not intend to undermine the importance of politics, but what he seeks to emphasize is that Islamic movements should not lose sight of balance and of its own true nature. However, he does not tell us, at least as far as I know, how that could be achieved.

The intention here, however, is not to delve deeper in the subject of the relationship between Islam and politics. It has already been covered extensively elsewhere. It would then suffice to underline the general consensus shared by all the Islamic movements concerning Islam: they believe that it is a complete way of life and that the idea of separating religion from politics is alien to its nature and paradigm. Interestingly, even some intellectuals who are very critical of Islamic movements like the Egyptian philosopher and writer, Hassan Hanafi, rejects the idea of separation. For Hanafi, for example, it means neutralizing Islam, “so that the authoritarian can secure himself against any opposition in the name of religion that may destroy him,” and it means also that the ruling elites want to govern according to their vested interests “with no regard to any law or rule.”¹⁹

If the establishment of an Islamic movement is viewed as the necessary practical tool to revive Islam and bring about social and political reform in Muslim countries, *ijtihad* [independent reasoning] is regarded as the intellectual mechanism to provide answers to a number of theoretical and practical issues; hence, the relevance of the concept of *ijtihad* in the discussion of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* or any other Islamic movement for that matter. *Ijtihad* may be defined as the independent intellectual effort to make a decision on a matter not covered by the *Quran* and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet but in a way that does not contravene an assured Islamic rule.²⁰ The mechanism of *ijtihad* is perceived to be at work not only in developing and formulating the position towards a wide range of issues such democracy, modernity, and *ijtihad* itself, etc., but also in devising the appropriate strategies to

secure comprehensive reform. It is no surprise, then, that it is considered one of the key concepts in the thought of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* as we shall see in chapter four.

One question seems unavoidable here: if all the Islamic groups draw on the same frame of reference and use the same mechanisms to generate opinions where the Islamic sources are silent, why do they differ and in some cases significantly? Is there one or several “*Islams*”? For Muslim scholars, thinkers and jurists the issue of differences of opinion is neither new nor to be ashamed of. It has existed since the early days of Islam and has taken, over the years, various forms: schools of thought, jurisprudence, theology, political trends, etc. In fact, it is considered a sign of strength, for it provides the mind with the opportunity to be constantly engaged and innovate and thereby maintain its dynamism.

Furthermore, the Islamic texts themselves allow such differences. In this respect scholars of Islam differentiate between two aspects: 1/ the meaning of the text; and 2/ the way it has been transmitted, which includes the number and the integrity of reporters. Concerning the meaning of the text, it can be either conclusive [*qatij*], that is, clear and has one meaning and cannot be open to any other interpretation, or non-conclusive [*dhanny*], which means that it may be open to more than one interpretation. As for the manner of its transmission, there are also two options: if the chain of transmission meets the criteria of authenticity, then it is considered conclusive; if it does not, then it will be regarded as non-conclusive.²¹

Such being the case, all the Islamic texts fall within four categories:

The first category refers to the texts that are conclusive in *both* meaning and transmission; the second category refers to the texts that are conclusive in meaning *but not* in transmission; the third refers to the texts that are *not* conclusive in meaning *but* conclusive in transmission; and the fourth covers those that are conclusive *neither* in meaning *nor* in transmission.²²

Each category entails a specific result. Any idea, practice or command or whatever which comes under the first category means that since it meets those two conditions, it is considered conclusive and no two Muslims should disagree about

it. The other three cases, however, are all open to interpretation. If we add to this matters not covered by Islamic texts, then one of the immediate conclusions that one cannot fail to infer here is that the space where texts are conclusive is very limited whereas the space for the use of *ijtihad* is immense indeed. On the basis of this, it could be safely said that most of the differences between Islamic groups belong to the last three categories or where the texts are silent.

However, it must be pointed out that difference of opinion may be due not only to the nature of the text, but also to the abilities, skills and qualifications of the interpreter. People differ in intelligence, scholarship and understanding of the realities of the environment in which they live and the domestic and the international circumstances. Thus, though there are some instructions on how to conduct *ijtihad*, the character and the qualifications of the interpreter, do have their bearing on *ijtihad* outcomes. In any case, the rule is that as long as an opinion is based on Islamic sources and this opinion does not contradict an assured Islamic law or text [of the first category], it should be respected as an Islamic opinion.

On the basis of the above discussion, however broad and brief, two remarks may be made. One is that though extremist groups have always existed and will probably continue to exist, they have never been able and will most probably never garner any significant public support in Muslim societies. Historically they have always lived on the fringe of society and though they can sometimes cause some mischief, they have never been and will never be able to drag Muslim societies in the fire of extremism, whatever its nature, creedal, intellectual, political or cultural. To substantiate such analysis, Muslim scholars often quote some sayings of the Prophet of which one reads: "My *Umma* will never agree upon an error."²³ The other remark which has been made by many scholars, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, is that the inbuilt mechanisms of the Islamic system of which *ijtihad* is just one among others make it possible for Islam to sustain what has been described as "continuity and change". Such provisions and mechanisms have enabled Islam to adapt to all times and circumstances while maintaining its core and spirit untouched. The fact that this reality has often been disregarded may at least partly account for the difficulty to devise adequate theories to better understand the

contemporary Islamic phenomenon, a point to which we shall return in the following paragraphs.

1.4 Theories and interpretations

Over the last four decades or so, and particularly since the Islamic resurgence became increasingly visible and started to garner more public support at the political level, the question that seems of particular interest and has been a subject of enduring debates is: how to understand this “new phenomenon” and what are the reasons behind its emergence? A lot has been said and written and many explanations have been put forward. We will examine here the most important of them and see how close they have come to capture a phenomenon that some analysts consider “new” whereas others regard as “old” as Islam itself.

According to a very common explanation, usually referred to as the “crisis theory”, the contemporary Islamic resurgence is the logical outcome of a series of concomitant social, political and military crises which rocked the Arab and Muslim world especially during the last half of the twentieth century. Richard Dekmejian, for example, maintains that the return to Islam is largely a response to the failure of the ruling elites in Islamic countries to establish a legitimate order and the failure to fulfill their promises of achieving development and social justice as a consequence of their incompetence, corruption and the inability to devise an adequate strategy for economic uplift and mass mobilization.²⁴ These failures, he contends, besides the successive military defeats, namely in the 1967 war between Israel and Arab countries, have triggered what he likens to “shock waves” in the Muslim world, generating thereby the feelings of fear, insecurity and inferiority which in turn have led many Muslims to regard Islam as a viable alternative. This does not mean, argues Dekmejian, that it is necessarily so, but since the other approaches have failed, the Islamic alternative is being taken just like another option to cope with the prevailing crises. What makes it different, however, from other approaches is that Islam in the eyes of a growing number of alienated Muslims seems “to provide a practical political alternative as well as a secure niche and psychological anchor in a turbulent world.”²⁵

From a descriptive point of view, Dekmejian's account is not to be refuted totally. Nobody can deny the presence of serious socio-economic and political problems in the Muslim societies and the failure of the ruling elite to solve or alleviate the dire consequences of these crises. Yet to claim that these problems can explain convincingly the rise of Islamism is far from the reality. If the social and political difficulties were to be considered a decisive factor, then we would have to prove why the Islamic resurgence did not occur during the colonial era, for example. The presence of those problems and their hard-felt effects were no less acute then than they are in the post colonial era.

Furthermore, this theory does not explain why the same factors do not have the same effects in other situations which are very similar. Why did the Islamic movement not emerge in the same Arab countries at the same time despite the striking similarity of their conditions? If the earliest forms of the Islamic resurgence saw the light of day in the early 1920s and 1930s in Egypt, Palestine and Pakistan, why did we have to wait until the 1970s and 1980s before we could witness its emergence in other Muslim countries? To push this argument further, we may even wonder why similar religious movements did not appear in non-Muslim countries if we assume that social and political crises make people turn to religion for solace. There are a number of questions which cast doubt on this theory and its assumptions concerning the Islamic resurgence, though it cannot be denied that it does point to some pertinent aspects.

In an attempt, perhaps, to propose a more viable interpretation, some analysts take a completely different direction and speak about what they call "the success theory". They maintain that there is a positive correlation between successful events in the Muslim world and the rising of Islamic reassertion. Thus it is argued that events like the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, the Arab oil embargo, the boom in oil revenues, the triumph of the Islamic revolution in Iran and the Afghan resistance to the Soviet invasion all "provided a new source of pride and served as a positive motivation for Islamic revivalism."²⁶

The implication of this theory is that given the prevailing Western hegemony and cultural imperialism, the impact of such events is such that it gave Muslims hope for further successes and a better future. Many people must have thought that if Islam succeeded in toppling a tyrannical rule in Iran, why not in other Muslim countries? If oil embargo, always according the same argument, could have its impact, though carried out only temporarily, then one could hardly imagine the empowering benefit of the vast resources, of which oil is just one ingredient, that are at the disposal of the Islamic countries. Such a line of thinking, it is assumed, appeared to have led many people to feel that the long cherished dream of being treated with respect and on an equal footing at the international level and of rising as a strong, respected *Umma* is not after all out of reach, contrary to claims maintained for so long by sceptics and defeatists in the name of realism. These bright prospects are seen to have motivated many young Muslims to turn to religion.

There are a number of remarks that could be brought against this theory. One obvious one is that those who claim that Islam acquired new vigor and intensity in Muslim societies in the 1970s and 1980s because of the events mentioned above seem to be unaware of the error their explanation incurs. They do not realize that Islamic movements had been in existence and active long before those events. The Muslim Brotherhood was founded by Hassan al-Banna in Egypt in 1928 and in the early 1930s and 1940s was able to recruit, according to some accounts, over one million of supporters in Egypt alone in a population of less than 20 million.²⁷ The Islamic Liberation Party was set up in Palestine in 1953 and was and is still active in a number of countries. Another influential Islamic movement is the *Jamaat-e-Islam* which was founded in Lahore in August in 1941 by a prominent Islamic figure, Abu al-Ala al-Mawdudi, and has been operating since then in the Indian subcontinent. This is not to mention apolitical organizations like *Tablighi Jamaat* [Society for the Propagation of Islam], a large transnational association which was founded in India in 1927 by Muhammad Ilyas al-Kandahlawi.

Such being the case, the “success theory” appears to be fundamentally flawed for the simple reason that it “places undue emphasis on factors that postdated the

actual emergence of the Islamic movements.”²⁸ If one cannot deny that some events may have a positive psychological impact, it is hard to prove that it could be permanent and thereby be considered a decisive factor behind the Islamic resurgence. As Esposito has pointed out, it is “naïve to attribute the Islamic revival mainly to oil.”²⁹

Some theorists contend that the “clash theory” is more suitable to explain the Islamic revival adequately than anything else suggested so far. They claim that this theory puts the Islamic phenomenon in its true context and sees it “as a continuation of the clash between two great civilizations, Islam and the West.”³⁰ Bernard Lewis, a scholar of Middle Eastern history who maintained close relationship with the Bush administration, is a prominent advocate of this theory. In 1990 he wrote an article about what he describes as “Muslim Rage” to convince the West of the nature and magnitude of the challenge it is facing. He stresses that it is “a mood and a movement far transcending the level of issues and policies and the governments that pursue them. This is no less than a clash of civilizations the perhaps irrational but surely historic reaction of an ancient rival against Judeo-Christian heritage, our secular present and the worldwide expansion of both.”³¹

According to such a view, then, the Islamic resurgence has nothing to do with issues, policies or the declared peaceful objectives of its various manifestations, but it rather represents the attempt of an old foe which is about to be “out of the bottle” to wage a “sacred war” against the “West, the matrix of the enemies of God.” As if to confirm further to the sceptics the validity of the clash of civilizations theory, Lewis states in another article that it is impossible to achieve “even prospect of peace” or to conceive of any “dialogue and compromise” with people motivated by “obscurantist ideas”.³²

This theory which seems to be beating the drum for conflict and confrontation is not appreciated, albeit for different reasons, by many scholars, Western and non-Western alike. John Esposito, for example, in his book *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality*, notes that “emphasis upon the clash of civilizations reinforces the tendency to downplay or overlook specific political and socio-economic causes for Muslim

behaviour, to see Muslim actions as an irrational reaction rather than a response to specific policies and actions... The primacy of political interests, policies and issues is dismissed or eclipsed by the vision of an age-old rivalry.”³³ Some critics have criticized this theory from other perspectives whereas others have gone even to suspect it of having contributed largely to the rise of Islamophobia or, to employ Halliday’s term, “anti-Muslimism” in the West.³⁴

Contrary to the analyses which smack of a mood for confrontation, proponents of what may be termed as “the bubble theory” think that the Islamic resurgence has been exaggerated too much. They contend that in spite of some successful events here and there under the banner of Islam, there is no need to be scared or to make of the phenomenon more than it actually is. It merely represents the last attempt “of the adherents of a great religion which has yet to come to terms theologically and convincingly with today’s world.”³⁵ In 1985 Elie Kedourie wrote an article to stress that “Islamic fundamentalism – [is] an idea whose time has gone.”³⁶ This view was also emphasized by another analyst who claim that “the political phenomenon we here identified as “Islamic fundamentalism” is a spent force now.”³⁷ Olivier Roy, a leading French analyst of Islam, wrote a book in 1992 where he explains how “the failure of Islam” has occurred. He argues that the “fundamentalists”, weakened, lacking in innovation and suffering from perennial paradoxes, are not expected to achieve anything of significance and concludes that “the Islamic revolution is behind us.”³⁸ Another French political scientist, Gilles Kepel, made a similar view when he wrote in a book published in 2000 that that the Islamic movement had entered a decade of decline since the early 1990s.³⁹ Before Roy and Kepel, Bernard Lewis could assert in 1980 that “the Islamic resurgence has reached its peak and that from now [1980] onwards it will probably decline rather than ascend.”⁴⁰

Analyses which have come to the same conclusion are not scarce. The major problem with Islamic movements, according to some, lies in their archaic nature and thus they are “destined either to wither away in the face of liberalization, rationalization and democratization or to assume the mantle of nemesis to an otherwise democratic, right-based, peace loving consortium of nations and

cultures.”⁴¹ Some critics have even expressed their dismay that “phenomena such as Islamic fundamentalism have survived into the modern era at all,” and predicted that “such fundamentally archaic impulses are destined to extinguish themselves in a flash of predictable but nonsensical violence.”⁴² Similar arguments which assert that the “fundamentalist bubble” is bound to burst sooner rather than later are not infrequent, though they slightly disagree as to how this extinguishment is likely to take place. Whereas some think that it will fade out slowly until it sinks into oblivion, others, as pointed out above, are of the view that it will occur abruptly following some botched acts of terrorism which would spur the whole world to come together to extirpate the “scourge” once and for all.

1.5 An alternative theoretical framework

It is beyond the purview of this study to survey the vast literature and assess all the interpretations of the Islamic movement and see how far they have gone to capture the contemporary Islamic phenomenon. However, the samples presented here seem to be enough to bring us face to face with a crucial question: Is there not an alternative, if none of the above theories sound adequate to satisfactorily explain the Islamic resurgence? For some analysts, it is still premature to speak of a comprehensive theory that would help to comprehend the Islamic phenomenon in all its dimensions. Instead, as Dekmejian himself has pointed out, one can only speak of general propositions “as explanatory hypotheses”. The reason, in his view, is that the Islamic revival is still in a period of transition and thus “it is foolhardy to identify any precise causal factors.”⁴³

Imad Shahin, an Egyptian specialist in Islamic movements, also agrees and identifies several factors which, in his view, could account for the difficulty of devising a theory to forecast and explain the emergence and spread of active Islamic movements. Some of these may be summed up as follows: 1/ the Islamic emergence is still in flux and all the Islamic movements are currently in a transitional phase at the political as well at the ideological level; 2/ Islamic movements operate in different environments and under different conditions, which makes the generalization about them a difficult task; 3/ most studies on Islamic

movements focus on those that are active politically but ignore those associations which, though apolitical, do have an impact that should not be undermined; 4/ a secular framework of analysis is sure to miss significant dimensions of the Islamic phenomenon such as the close relationship between Islam and politics.⁴⁴

Despite the plausibility of these arguments, attempts to cope with a very complex phenomenon have never been given up. Two examples, however, which point to the growing importance of a tendency in the study of Islamic movements, will be mentioned here. One is represented by John Voll, professor of history and author and co-author of important books and articles on Islam and the Middle East. In 1982 he published a book titled, *Islam: Continuity and Change in the Modern World* where he discusses at length the contemporary Islamic experience and how it could be better understood. He speaks about the need to go beyond the analyses which see the Islamic resurgence as primarily motivated by socio-economic and political problems whereas Islam is being picked merely as an instrument to channel those issues. These analyses, as he points out, exclude “the possibility of a truly Islamic-inspired anti-imperialism or an Islamic-oriented desire for social transformation.”⁴⁵ They also fail to appreciate the durability of the phenomenon.⁴⁶

As an alternative, Voll proposes an approach that takes into account three dimensions: 1/ the individuals and groups involved in the Islamic revival and the local conditions in which they evolved; 2/ the relationship of the Islamic movements to the basic dynamics of modern world history on the grounds that these movements do not emerge and operate in isolation of the rest of the world; and 3/ Islam itself in order to situate these movements in their Islamic as well as their modern context and thereby “avoiding the pitfalls of using only a modernization model as the basis for analysis.”⁴⁷ This three-dimensional approach, as he calls it, is important to secure a better understanding and all the more so because it recognizes the dynamic vitality that the faith has assumed in the changing historical circumstances. Voll does not claim that his approach is ideal, but it is perceived as a possible framework for analysis.

A second example may be represented by Roxanne Euben. In her book, *Enemy in the Mirror: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Limits of Modern Rationalism*, she argues that the reason for the inability to achieve a good understanding of the Islamic activism has its origin in the theoretical discourse dominant in the West, “a theoretical discourse that no longer sees any place for metaphysics in political life.”⁴⁸ The problem, then, is in the framework used for analysis and understanding and not because the Islamic phenomenon is impossible to comprehend. She goes even to suggest that “the more our stories about politics...are committed to a rationalist epistemology, the more difficult we may have in compassing the significance of practices guided by and defined in terms of belief in divine truths unknowable by purely human means.”⁴⁹

The problem does not stop there, that is, in the increasing difficulty to understand the significance of ideas, practices and behaviours informed by a different worldview, but also in the fact that the secular framework seeks to reinforce an idea the core of which is that “religio-political movements (among others) stand in relation to Western secular power and internal order as the chaos of the particularistic, irrational, and archaic stand in relation to the universalistic, rational, and modern.”⁵⁰ It is no surprise, Euben concludes, that “political Islam” is now depicted in many accounts as a menace “to be contained or overcome.”⁵¹ It is the logical outcome of an approach anchored in a secular culture and applied to an experience which emanated and evolved in a different historical and cultural context.

Euben criticizes the explanations which view Islamism as “a reflex reaction to certain political or socio-economic circumstances,”⁵² or that Islam is being picked up simply because it is considered a powerful vehicle for channeling “political and economic demands rather than being itself the impulse behind these demands,”⁵³ or, as some claim, it is the last option being left. Such arguments, in her view, if accepted, would entail that “moral beliefs are selected as are tools in a hardware store, chosen only for their efficiency, or because the store was out of all brands...[R]eligious convictions -as are all convictions worth the name- are far too

complex to be either reduced to an option in the marketplace of ideas or minimized as a “refuge that provides emotional peace and comfort.”⁵⁴

In order to overcome the weaknesses and the limits of such approaches and the flawed explanations they have generated, Euben proposes what she calls “a dialogic model of interpretation”. She explains that in adopting this model, she draws on “debates within and about hermeneutics, a tradition, in its modern formulation, has been influenced largely by the work of Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer but has been elaborated in a variety of disciplines by a variety of scholars.”⁵⁵ This model, as she demonstrates in her book, involves an interpretative approach which aims to reach an in-depth understanding of the Islamic phenomenon.

However, in order to achieve this goal, the dialogic model of interpretation requires taking into account certain conditions. To provide an adequate explanation, the interpreter has to present the Islamists’ ideas, experiences and arguments using their own terms and categories rather than terms and categories outside their own worldview.⁵⁶ One has to take their discourse seriously and move away from the tendency, maintained so far by rationalist discourse, to dismiss readily whatever the Islamists say or do as pathological or irrational. The interpreter is also invited to be aware of the factors that could distort his or her explanation. As Gadamer argues, “an interpreter sees all objects of interpretation from within the horizon of her own worldview, her own belief, norms and practices.”⁵⁷ Thus in order to generate “a better understanding”, it is important to insure that “the process of explicating meanings and advocating causal explanations begins with terms and categories used by the participants themselves.”⁵⁸ Euben uses here “participants” because the process of interpreting is viewed in this model as a dialogue between the interpreter and the person or group whose ideas are to be studied.

Though the dialogic model of interpretation is committed to the actors’ self-understanding, it does not mean that there is no room for critique or assessment. Far from it; some distance is not only possible but necessary. What is important, however, as Gadamer puts it, “is to be aware of one’s own bias,”⁵⁹ and, as Euben

remarks, to the fact that “the Western rationalist discourse continues both to frame and create our notions not only of ourselves but also of the world around us.”⁶⁰ Euben does not claim that the model she suggests is perfect or “invulnerable to distortions” but she thinks that it is less susceptible to them if the interpreter is permanently attentive not only to the effects exerted by his or her own ontological and epistemological position but also “to the inequality of participants in dialogue in a post-colonial world and...to the inevitable implication of power, and lack of power, in interpretation.”⁶¹

This author has opted for the use of the dialogic model of interpretation, adopted by Euben and other students of Islamic activism, as a theoretical framework for the study and analysis of the topic of this thesis. Compared to the rationalist perspectives, examples of which have been discussed above, this model seems to provide ample opportunity and a better chance of coming closer to grasp what the Islamists want, what they are up to and what their real motives and concerns are. Therefore, to use it with the aim to achieve a better understanding of the nature of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, how it operates within the Moroccan society, its strategies, its intellectual and political stances and, more importantly, those aspects which could explain its appeal is very useful. As Euben has pointed out, there are many justifications for its adoption, which may be summed up as follows:

1/ It allows for an intellectual space to present the Islamists’ ideas, practices and motives in their own terms and categories.

2/ Since not all interpreters can succeed to render the Islamists’ understandings and vision adequately, this model requires what Alfred Schutz calls the “postulate of adequacy”.⁶² This entails a standard of compatibility between the interpreter and the actors’ self-understandings themselves.

3/ It provides for a conception of distance that leaves sufficient room for critique and evaluation. In other words, to attend to the Islamists’ understandings does not mean, as Gilles Kepel puts it, that one should become their advocate or fellow traveler.⁶³

4/ It allows to take seriously the Islamists' societal project which, as Kepel again remarks, if it cannot be interpreted in terms of Western categories of thought, cannot be said that it stems from "a dethronement of reason or from manipulation by hidden forces."⁶⁴

5/ It constitutes a genuine endeavour to overcome the conventional secular assumptions and the false dichotomies that abound in the literature on the study of Islam and the Muslim world, namely this duality between "Us", the people of the North, civilized, modern and democratic and "Them", the uncivilized, backward, and undemocratic people of the South. The dialogic model of interpretation promotes cross-cultural dialogue and sound communication with the "Other".

6/ It offers the opportunity to detect the features that could explain the particular draw of the Islamic phenomenon in general and why some groups seem to be more appealing than others though they refer to the same Islamic sources, which is the main purpose of this thesis.

7/ Last but not least, the dialogic model of interpretation allows for certain flexibility and does not exclude the possibility of benefiting from the insights of other perspectives, rationalist or otherwise.

Such were some of the important justifications for the use of the dialogic model of interpretation in this thesis. However, to come to this decision is not all that is required for the achievement of a better understanding of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*. The reliable sources, how to access them and, more importantly, how to handle them constitute another crucial factor, to which we shall now return.

1.6 A method of approaching the sources

A few months before the death of Sheikh Yassine, an international conference was held in Istanbul, Turkey, to shed light on "the theory of the Prophetic method", a theory devised by Yassine for the renewal of Islam and the reform of the Muslim individual, society and government.⁶⁵ Researchers and academics from various parts of the world attended to bring their input and share their views. One of the

recommendations issued by the conference is that various opportunities should be organized to explore further Yassine's ideas which, according to the participants, constitute an original contribution to the contemporary Islamic thought. The event and the ensuing recommendations corroborate further the argument that it is imperative for any researcher interested in knowing about the nature of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* and what it stands for to study in depth the works, or the major ones at least, of its leader Sheikh Yassine.

The author of this thesis did not wait for the Istanbul conference to convene and issue the above recommendations to take the works of Yassine seriously. He settled on the idea from the start. The question, however, is how to handle thousands of pages, in prose and in poetry, in Arabic and French and hundreds of videos and audio recordings. The answer to this question, as this author has found out, is of great importance in order to build one's analysis on accurate information. It would be an error –which is quite common- to randomly pick up one of Yassine's books, have a look at the table of contents and think that it is enough to know about the writer's final position on some of the issues raised. It all depends; it may be so and it may be not, which necessitates further clarifications.

Sheikh Yassine was not just an author or theoretician who once he devised his "theory", brought it to the marketplace and forgot about it. He was also founder of a movement with the aim to link theory to practice and from the interaction with the existing reality he could see whether some ideas needed to be refined, modified or even dropped all together. As he told this researcher in an interview, a theory is never born complete, if it could ever be so. It begins as a broad idea and with the passage of time and after continuous elaboration, in-depth thinking, further experience and repeated adjustments, it takes shape. What is important is that one should be open to new ideas and not hesitate to change his if need be.⁶⁶

Be that as it may, there are a number of points that the researcher has to bear in mind for a sound and proper use of the movement's sources, written or otherwise. One relates to chronology, that is, the researcher should be more attentive to the date when the book (or any other document) was written and completed than when

it was published. This is important in order to follow the evolution of the writer's thought and to capture the final stance towards the issue to be investigated. To ignore this is sure to lead to inaccurate conclusions. For instance, Yassine was initially against pluralism in Islamic activism. He believed at the time that all the Islamic groups should be united under a single organization. This is what the researcher would find in the first edition of *al-Minhaj an-Nabawi* [The Prophetic Method]. However, realizing that it was not practical, Yassine changed his view and in the second edition of *al-Minhaj*, we read that pluralism in Islamic activism is not only permitted but unavoidable. In this case, then, using the right edition would be crucial to know the true position. The same could be said about other issues. To cite one more example, to refer to the writings of Yassine before 1977 requires some cautiousness: many of his ideas have evolved since then, particularly in the political sphere.

A second point has to do with terminology. Yassine was keen on the use of Islamic terminology. It is not out of some cultural chauvinism that he insisted on certain terms but rather because he believed that concepts are not always neutral. They reflect the values and the culture that they spring from. For this reason we find that he preferred, for example, "*kawma*" [uprising] instead of "*thawra*" [revolution] because the cultural charge is not believed to be the same: the former, he argues, involves "legitimate force"; the latter "violence and bloodshed". The same could be said about other terms such as *shura* [consultation], democracy, etc. Therefore, to be sure of the meaning of the concepts Yassine used, one should be attentive to the definitions that he himself provided or consult the Islamic sources on which he based his arguments.

To make a distinction between the changeable and the unchangeable in the vision adopted by *al-Adl wal-ihsan* is the third point that a researcher should take into account. If established Islamic principles fall within the latter category and consequently are considered immutable, anything else is open to assessment and thus subject to improvement, modification or complete change. An aspect, though self evident, which has strangely escaped all those who have written on *al-Adl wal-ihsan* concerns its organization. They all based their argument on the chapter

dealing with this issue in *al-Minhaj an-Nabawi* [The Prophetic Method], a book which Yassine completed and published more than three decades ago. The format that was suggested then was meant to be a starting point and not to be stuck to like a God-given order. A movement like *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, dynamic and continuously growing, cannot get stuck in a fixed format all the time. Whether it wants it or not, it would be compelled inevitably to revise its organizational structure constantly. For this reason to write about the organization of the movement one should refer to other sources and not to *al-Minhaj an-Nabawi* despite its importance. This is what this thesis has done and thus been able to provide for the first time not only how the movement has evolved over the last thirty years but also the most recent organizational format the movement has adopted.

The question that arises here is: how can we know about what is still valid and what is not? Two sources seem crucial to overcome this problem. One is to seek interviews with key members of the movement, and it is up to the researcher to decide which type of interview best fits his or her purpose. The author of this thesis has opted for the unstructured form for various reasons. Tim May has cited two: "First it provides qualitative depth by allowing interviewees to talk about the subject within their own frames of reference. [...] Second, it thereby provides a greater understanding of the subject's point of view."⁶⁷ To these two, it could be added that it allows for the flexibility to clarify questions that may not be well understood⁶⁸ and the chance to come across some information that may be more important than what the researcher is seeking. It furthermore helps to find out about some sensitive issues that the interviewee may not want to talk about for one reason or another. This should not be surprising given the prevailing conditions in countries like Morocco. Many people are sometimes sceptical of the aims of certain researchers and suspect that some questions may have more to do with *mokhabarat* [intelligence services] than with proper academic research. Therefore, the question of trust is important. Unless one is trusted and is well connected, he may not know where to go to conduct reliable interviews and even if he does, he may not obtain the required information. As Spadly has rightly pointed out, "mutual trust allows free flow of information."⁶⁹

The other source that should also be helpful either to supply the missing information or to get updated about the changes that the movement may have undergone relates to documents. Each organization may have its published and unpublished documents, and *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* is no exception. In fact, according to reliable sources, it has a considerable amount of them, unpublished in most cases. As we are often reminded by experts in the field, this source should not be neglected, for it has the potential to be of great value for the researcher. Indeed, the benefits that this thesis has drawn from the use of documents are not to be undermined. Otherwise, there is no way to know, for instance, the real reasons that made the movement change its initial name *Usrat al-Jamaa* to *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* if accessibility to the sole document that exists in this respect was not possible.

A variety of people, though not large in number but deemed representative and sufficient for the purpose of this thesis, have been interviewed, including academics, party politicians, leaders of other Islamic groups. I must admit that access was not hard given the fact that I have been acquainted with most of the interviewees for a long time and some, including the current president of Moroccan government, Abd al-Ilah Benkiran, since we were students at university. Some documents about certain political parties have also been used, thanks to some friends affiliated to these parties themselves. Furthermore, a wide range of secondary sources, as will be seen, have been consulted, though the bibliography only enlists those cited.

Some sources such as reports by national and international NGOs, Websites, scholarly articles and international magazines have been employed where found befitting the purpose of this thesis. However, as will be noticed, this thesis has not made much use of the Moroccan media for a very simple reason that all the observers of the Moroccan affairs are well aware of: there is no free media, in the true sense, in Morocco, despite claims to the contrary.⁷⁰ Even what is described as “independent press” is only independent within the very limited space allowed by the regime. Those who tried to stretch the boundaries just a little further were dealt with harshly. Ali Lamrabat, editor of two Moroccan weeklies, *Demain* [French and Arabic], Abu Bakr al-Jamii, founder and editor of the weekly magazine *Le Journal*

and Rachid Nini, former chronicler, editor and director of *Almassae*, are just three examples among others. The sad point is that in order for some to stay alive within a stifling space, as it turns out, they have found themselves serving consciously or unconsciously the ruling elite's political agenda.

Two final remarks need to be made here concerning the research method followed in this thesis. One is about the ethics issue. Given that the organization being studied here is not on good terms with the Moroccan *Makhzen*⁷¹, the rules of ethics have been rigorously observed. Where the names of certain interviewees are mentioned, it is because of their consent; otherwise, anonymity is maintained. Documents as well as some information which may be used for the first time are all approved by the leadership of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*. It follows that some issues that are considered sensitive, mostly for security reasons, are left out.

The other point is that though the nature of the subject to be investigated situates it within the qualitative tradition and entails a great deal of interpretation, a serious effort has been made to come up with a piece that tries to reflect to the best judgment of this author what is perceived to be the true nature of an influential Islamic movement in Morocco and the reasons behind its appeal over the last three decades. The author of this thesis does not deny that he, like any other human being, has his own preferences, but it is not here that one should come to expose them.

1.7 Outline of thesis

This study is divided into nine chapters, including the introduction and the conclusion. The introductory chapter, as explained above, presents the research questions, the thesis argument, clarifications of some terms and issues related to the subject under investigation, discussion of the major approaches to the study of Islamic movements, the rationale for the theoretical framework adopted for this study and some methodological ideas concerning the sources to be used for this thesis.

Chapter 2 focuses on Yassine's personality and the events and experiences which have contributed to shape his thought and strategy for social and political reform in Morocco. It seeks to examine his early childhood, his education and career and his Sufi experience and see how all of these have combined and impacted the form of Islamism which makes him and his movement *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* distinct in important respects from other Islamic groups in Morocco as well as in other Arab countries. It also discusses certain theories which have tried to explain some significant events in the life of the leader of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, namely his Sufi experience, his open letter to the king called *Islam aw at-Tufan* [*Islam or the Deluge*] and his decision to set up an Islamic organization.

Chapter 3 covers a period of about three decades and seeks to see how Yassine and his group made their debut and got well established in a political space dominated by a single person, the ruling monarch, and where opposition forces were facing serious challenges. The first section of this chapter explores the movement's endeavours to cope with this obstacle since its inception in 1981 until it took a new name, *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, in 1987. The second section covers almost twelve years, until King Hassan II died, bringing into light the regime's new strategies which culminated in different forms of repression and the outcome of such a policy towards the movement. The third section deals with the period beginning in 1999, when the new king, Mohammad VI, ascended the throne until the present time. The section also discusses whether a change of the ruling team entailed a rupture with what is termed "the years of lead" or a continuity of the same old policies in different forms towards political opponents in general and *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* in particular. The final section, however, seeks to examine the inside, so to speak, of the movement and see how it started and has developed in terms of organizational structure and how it has been able to maintain its coherence over the last three decades.

Chapter 4 focuses on the key concepts we frequently come across in the writings of Sheikh Yassine which constitute the pillars of the movement's intellectual basis. Three selected concepts -*ijtihad*, *fitna*, *ihsan*- which have triggered no small amount of controversy will be discussed. Sheikh Yassine has employed them not

only to secure effective communication and clarity of message in dealing with modern concerns but also to call into question some conventional ideas which had dominated the Islamic thought for years and even for centuries.

Chapter 5 sets out to highlight the attitude of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* towards modernity, democracy and women's rights. The main argument threading the three sections of this chapter that Yassine seeks to make is to challenge the view which maintains that the parameters of the field of discussion of such issues should be dictated by the Enlightenment philosophy. Muslim societies, in his view, should have the right to define their discourse and apply the criteria of the worldview to which they adhere to consider topics like the ones examined here. The focus of the discussion, however, is not to compare in order to prove which worldview is better, but rather to highlight a stance defended by Yassine and his group, among others, which posits that the world, despite agreed common values, is basically plural and diverse and it is in the interest of all that it should continue thus and not try to make a "melting-pot" of what is by definition "unmeltable".

Using comparative approach, I discuss in chapters 6 and 7 three major strategies used to achieve social and political reform in Morocco. The first has sought to get rid of the monarchical rule to allow for change to occur. This is the revolutionary strategy which may be represented by what is called "*Option Révolutionnaire*" [the Revolutionary Option] whose major theoretician is the famous leftist leader Mehdi Ben Barka. The second strategy which may be described as "reformist" advocates working from within the system to pressure for political change, and *l'Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires (USFP)* [Socialist Union of Popular Forces] is taken as an example. Both strategies, however, have so far failed to achieve their goals. Chapter 7 is devoted to what may be qualified as a third-way strategy advocated by *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*. Specific attention is made to the basic features of such a strategy, how it differs from the previous ones and its chances of success.

Chapter 8 focuses on *tarbiya* [education], an issue which *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* regards as one of the two major fronts in the struggle for comprehensive social and political

reform. It demonstrates how *tarbiya* is understood and practised and why it is considered, in the movement's strategy, of great importance.

The concluding chapter summarizes the conclusions drawn from this study, points to some speculations on the future of the movement now that its charismatic leader Sheikh Abdessalam Yassine has passed away and ends with some suggestions for further research.

Chapter 2 Sheikh Yassine and the Quest for Reform

According to an old political principle, “regimes often have the opponents they deserve.”¹ Does this apply to the case of the Moroccan regime and its arch opponent, prominent Islamic leader Abdessalam Yassine? For nearly four decades the late king, Hassan II ruled and reigned autocratically. He could not conceive of the possibility of sharing power with anyone, let alone seriously questioning his legitimacy. He faced scores of political, religious, civil and military dissidents and did not hesitate to ruthlessly crush whoever was deemed a potential threat to his rule. Stories of those who did not disappear for good or dissolved in acid like what is believed to have happened to Mehdi Ben Barka,² a brilliant mathematician and opposition leftist leader of international renown, but had to spend long years in abject secret detention centres, like the notorious Tazmamart, are now available for anyone interested to have an idea about the atrocities committed since Morocco regained its independence in 1956.³

If that is the rule of King Hassan’s rule, does it not have any exception? The early 1970s provides us with an answer that may confirm the idea that “tough rule” generates “tough opposition”.⁴ A brilliant intellectual and scholar, as is now often described by his admirers as well as by his harsh critics, unexpectedly stepped forward to say publicly and emphatically to the king the very word he did not tolerate: No. His famous letter, *Islam or the Deluge*, which he sent to Hassan II in 1974, explains why it was high time to say so to the Commander of the Faithful. Since then a popular belief circulated to the effect that the king feared Sheikh Yassine. This was confirmed later by a number of diplomats and observers such as Hofman, a German diplomat and former ambassador to Morocco, in his review of Yassine’s book, *Winning the Modern World for Islam* and also by Stephen Hughes who, after an interview with Yassine, seemed perplexed that though there was “nothing fearsome in his [Yassine’s] demeanour, ...King Hassan feared him.”⁵

What made a determined autocrat like Hassan II fear a single person who had neither the fame nor the support that other prominent Moroccan figures like Allal al-Afassi or Ben Barka enjoyed?⁶ Certainly Yassine did have his share of the monarch's bounty in the form of imprisonment, a decade-long house arrest, constant harassment, but it is almost nothing compared to what the victims of Tazmamart, for example, suffered. What spared Yassine a similar fate? How did he manage to start an Islamic movement now widely believed to be the largest and best organized in Morocco under the eyes of a monarch whose major defect was that he was only too much authoritative?⁷

This chapter focuses on the personality of the leader of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* and the events and experiences which have contributed to shape his thought and strategy for social and political reform in Morocco. It seeks to examine his early childhood, his education and career and his Sufi experience and see how all of these have combined and impacted the form of Islamism which makes him and his movement *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* different in important respects from other Islamic groups in Morocco as well as in other Arab countries. It is expected to contribute significantly to answer a number of what appears to be intriguing and perplexing questions as to the true nature of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* and the particular appeal it has been able to maintain in Morocco over the last three decades, which is our major concern in this study.

2.1 Birth, upbringing and career⁸

On Monday morning, 4th Rabi' II, 1347 of the Muslim calendar, corresponding 20th September 1928, Abdessalam Yassine was born in Marrakech, a city known for its "Seven Saints" as well as a number of distinguished scholars and leaders and decisive events in Morocco's history. His father Muhammad ibn Salam ibn Abdellah ibn Ibrahim was a poor, Berber peasant who left his village Ait Zeltan in Haha in the Suss region and came to settle down in Marrakech at an early age. Yassine is part of an old family called "Ait Bihi" whose lineage goes back to Mulay Idriss I, one of the great grandsons of Prophet Muhammad and founder of the first Islamic rule in Morocco.

As a child Abdessalam Yassine entered a religious school (*Maahad Dini*) founded by Almkhtar As-Sussi, an eminent scholar whose writings cover a wide range of topics including literature, history, Arabic sciences, and the like. There young Yassine demonstrated that he was a gifted learner with a prodigious memory and a brilliant intellect. He committed the whole Quran in a very short time and acquired a high command of the Arabic language to the extent that he could write poetry before the age of twelve. The language of the Quran, he reports, has had a great impact on his personality and his writings.⁹

Prior to his admission to Ibn Yussef Institute for Arabic and Islamic studies in Marrakech in 1943, Yassine was interviewed by two members of the admissions committee who were impressed by his high achievement level. Consequently, they decided that he skip the primary level entirely (which at the time usually took three years of study) and be admitted directly to secondary schooling level. He spent there four years during which he excelled among his classmates. However, he did not confine himself to what was taught at the Institute, which he sometimes found unsatisfactory and lacking in creativity, but he read whatever came to hand, besides starting on his own learning some foreign languages. In a recent interview with this author, he said:

I had an insatiable thirst for learning and I did not focus on one special field of study. I read a lot on Western and world culture and civilization, and my reading involved a wide variety of subjects: history, literature, Arts, sociology, psychology, foreign languages, classic music... [*and he could have added: besides learning how to play certain musical instruments, namely the violin*]. In fact, by those days' standards, you could say that I spent a good deal of money on the acquisition of a collection of classical music recordings, and Beethoven's fifth symphony had its special appeal. (...) I can't believe what I was doing at the time. I wanted to do everything, ... To give just one example, when I tried to learn the Russian language, I wanted to do it as fast as possible. So, once I learnt some basic things about that language, I picked up Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, a huge volume, as you know, and started to read it in Russian. [*He smiled*] (...)This... shows that unless you have the right methodology and proper supervision, your energy and enthusiasm might involve you in unrealistic objectives...¹⁰

In 1947, after passing a competitive exam to recruit primary education teachers, Yassine entered the teacher training school in Rabat. This change in educational settings and circumstances which involved moving from Marrakech, the southern

capital of the Berber region, to Rabat, a modern administrative city, proved very beneficial to young Yassine's life experience. He would have the opportunity to meet other people from different Moroccan regions, particularly at the boarding school of Mulay Youssef where he stayed during his training course. During break times or when and where the opportunity arose, he and other students would meet together to share their concerns, exchange ideas or debate issues of special interest. In a word, the new environment, and especially the competitiveness which was encouraged among students, had a positive impact on his efforts to boost his abilities and broaden his knowledge. This does not mean that everything was fine. He never forgot some officials' discriminating treatment of his group of students compared to the lavish care and respect reserved to the "Francophone" group students. But this only made him even more determined to increase his knowledge of foreign languages.

After graduation with highest distinction, Yassine was appointed in 1948 as an Arabic teacher at a primary school called at the time *Madrassat al-A'ayan* (School of the Notables) in Eljadida, a small town on the Atlantic coast, about 60 miles south of Casablanca. As his father had died earlier that year and his mother had no other children, Yassine had to bring her to live with him in his new home in Eljadida.

Still young and full of energy and ambition, young Yassine adapted quickly to his new circumstances; and despite the demands of his new teaching position, which he fulfilled well, nothing would deter him from pursuing his studies. In fact, he was able to successfully complete in a few years a high degree at the Institute for Higher Islamic Studies in Rabat. Shortly afterwards, he went back to Marrakech to work as a teacher of Arabic and translation, a position which he held for three years. In October 1955 he sat for a competitive exam for the recruitment of school inspectors and, upon his success, he was named to the post of Arabic School Inspector (of primary and later of secondary levels too).

When Morocco achieved its independence in 1956, Mr Yassine was among the first generation of young educated Moroccans who were assigned to a position of

responsibility. However, all of the posts he was appointed to from 1956 until he left in 1968, the activities he supervised or in which he participated, the contributions he made were related to education and the Ministry of Education. They may be summed up as follows:

1. Primary and secondary school inspection in different regions of Morocco;
2. Regional educational and administrative positions (Casablanca in Oct. 1957; Marrakech in Jan. 1963);
3. Director of the Teacher Training School (Marrakech in May 1959);
4. Director of the School Inspector Training Centre (Rabat in Oct. 1965);
5. He authored and co-authored a number of school textbooks and published other studies on education in general and in particular on the acquisition and development of certain skills such as: How to Write a Pedagogical Essay;
6. He attended many educational training courses abroad, ranging from a few days to seven months: in France, USA, Lebanon, Tunis, Algeria, and other African countries.

What should be noted here is that Yassine's road to professional success was not always paved with roses, nor was he ever satisfied with the working circumstances. He never concealed his opinions or his indignation at unfair practices so much so that in certain cases what he was being offered in the form of a promotion was much more a way to keep him away than anything else. Yassine was not totally unaware of these manoeuvres. No wonder that he, like many other educated Moroccans, was long worried that the country was not put on the right track after independence, and as a result corruption, clientelism, mismanagement and the like defects were spreading rapidly within the power structure. Yassine got more and more uneasy about such unfortunate developments whereas his integrity and rejection of corrupt practices seemed to have become increasingly embarrassing to government officials. In 1968 Yassine stopped going to work partly for health reasons and partly for what he found unbearable working

conditions. The authorities could not have agreed more to such an exit. He never showed up and they never called him back.

2.2 A Turning point

By 1965 Mr Yassine had achieved a position deemed socially very comfortable. Professionally, he had moved through the hierarchy of the public system until he became, as he described himself later in his famous letter to King Hassan, “one of the princes of the Moroccan administration.”¹¹ Materially, he had acquired all the means viewed as signs of a successful career and a happy life. He had a nice Mercedes car which only a few people could afford at the time, a large “villa” (a mansion) and a decent income. Intellectually, he was a highly educated man and above all he regarded himself as a good Muslim. He fulfilled his prayers and other religious duties regularly and read the Quran from time to time in order not to forget it. Was there anything else that could be sought for?

Yet Yassine was far from being satisfied and when he approached the age of forty, he was all of a sudden overwhelmed by a kind of anxiety over the meaning of life and death and of his existence, a deep feeling that there was something missing in him. Though he had never neglected his religious duties, he discovered that his Islam was flat and his prayers were devoid of spiritual warmth. It was, as he described it later, a kind of spiritual awakening that some people mistook for craziness.¹² What he experienced, however, was too powerful to be discouraged by what others might say about him.

Yassine talked about this critical moment of his life several times and tried hard to explain what had happened. Once he pointed out that even the word “crisis”, though he himself sometimes used it, was not adequate to describe what he went through. For him “it was a pure quest for God.”¹³ He regretted that though he had achieved many things and learnt through independent study and wide reading what made him in the eyes of his peers a cultivated man, he found out then that the most important thing had escaped him, that is, to know his Creator. This awareness was all the more intensified when he started reading books on Sufism

and got familiar with the testimony of many eminent and trustworthy scholars such as Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and what they had achieved in this respect.

One of the basic things Yassine learnt from reading a wide range of Sufi books was that unless he was assisted and guided by a Sufi sheikh, his endeavours would lead him nowhere. The question, however, was: where could he find this man and how could he trust that he was the right guide? These were not futile questions and their legitimacy stems from the fact that many disparaging remarks were, and still are, attributed rightly or wrongly to Sufi Orders. How to overcome such an obstacle, Yassine did not know for sure; nonetheless, he was determined to continue his search. At one moment, he even considered going to Indonesia, but he soon learnt that he did not have to go that far and that the man he was looking for was nearby in a small village called Madagh near Oujda, in north-eastern Morocco.

Talking about his encounter with his Sufi sheikh, Al-Haj al-Abbas, he writes:

I met a sheikh named Al-Abbas, and I saw him for six years. He was not illiterate, but he only had a traditional rural education. On the other hand, I, I who was imbued at the time with my own self sufficiency –I was an important person at the Ministry of Education– I became his disciple, his humble disciple, and I understood what was Islam, what was God. Very humbly I recognized that this man gave me a great deal.¹⁴

Yassine vividly recalled those days and what he had to go through not only before but also after he had met Al-Haj al-Abbas. During his search it took him a lot of time, patience and perseverance before he could say for sure he found the very man he had been looking for; and once it was known that he had joined a Sufi order, many people could not believe it. How could Yassine, with the talents, intellect and knowledge he had, have made such a choice, many wondered. Others thought and, in fact, did spread the news that Yassine had gone mad. What tended to mitigate, however, the pressure that was coming from all sides, from relatives, colleagues, friends, and even from close family members was the new spiritual experience itself which started to bear fruit shortly after his consent to be a disciple of al-Haj al-Abbas.¹⁵

To be fair it is not surprising that some people should disagree or even be dismayed that Yassine should have joined the Bouchechia Sufi Order, particularly at an age when he was thought to be a very mature person and was not expected to make a rash decision or a reckless choice. Sufism is one of the issues upon which Muslim scholars have widely disagreed for centuries. At the one extreme of the spectrum there are those who reject it altogether regarding it as a phenomenon alien to Islam; at the other we find those who considers it the only acceptable form of Islam; but between the complete rejection and the unconditional acceptance we met with eminent scholars -and Ibn Taymia is just one among many others- who have adopted a rather balanced point of view.¹⁶ We will turn to discuss this issue later on.

Suffice it to say here that Yassine's encounter with Sheikh al-Abbas marked the beginning of a new phase of Yassine's life which lasted for six years and during which he had the chance, as he said, to read "the Quran and the prophetic Sunna with a new heart."¹⁷

Anyone who is familiar with Sufi culture knows well that obedience is one of the basic conditions to join the Sufi sphere, and in certain cases it is pushed to the extreme. Yassine, however, seemed to have lived his Sufi experience in a rather different way. He never lost critical thinking or refrained from speaking against what he considered not allowed by Islam. Thus, while he was still affiliated with the Bouchichiya Brotherhood, he used to speak against some practices which he thought do not conform with the Islamic principles to the extent that he was dubbed "Mr Yassine *Sharia*" by members of the Brotherhood, meaning that he insisted too much on respect for the *Sharia* precepts.

Unfortunately, his remarks were not welcomed and his efforts to stop the deviations that were creeping into the Zawiya were not very successful, particularly because his Sufi master had become very old and the Brotherhood had grown considerably and continued to attract new members of different social classes. This was not always beneficial for the Zawiya, for it created more problems than it solved them. For Yassine, the Zawiya already ceased to be the modest place it

used to be. When he first joined it, he found a few plain people sitting on straw mats and their food was very simple. That simplicity was gone and the Zawiya, as he explained later, became “a site of consumption,” instead of “a refuge for the poor.” “I saw furniture introduced into the Zawiya and how it was invaded by gifts.”¹⁸

In 1972 the man whom Yassine held dear to his heart and followed [i.e. al-Haj al-Abbas] passed away. Yassine stayed on in the hope that the people of the Boutchichi Zawiya might be willing to accommodate certain changes and thus be led to play a more positive role in society. Unfortunately, things did not evolve as he had wished, and, once convinced that the Zawiya was not going to improve in any significant way, he decided to leave for good but quietly.

Some people have offered a different explanation of his rupture with the Boutchichi Zawiya. They claim that the real cause of his departure is that he had aspired to become the leader of the Butchichya after the death of Sheikh al-Abbas, but when the leadership was passed to the latter’s son al-Haj Hamza, he felt disappointed and left. This explanation, unfounded and of which there is no mention even in the writings of the Butchichya itself, has been picked up and reiterated by some authors.¹⁹ In so doing, they seem to be unaware of the contradiction such an explanation would entail. That is the last thing Yassine could have coveted. It is not in line with what Yassine searched for and for which he devoted his whole life. Why should he take the long, hard road to something which he could have achieved via many a short cut? “I had no personal ambition,” he said. “I had this ambition which goes beyond limits, which transcends life and death: I wanted to please God.”²⁰ Admittedly, an outsider may find this hard to digest.

Indeed one author has come up with an idea which says that “the break with the brotherhood served later in the creation of the figure of the saint.”²¹ This claim, I argue, is no more valid than the previous one. It entails bringing together two contradictory and mutually exclusive aspects. To claim that Yassine, or anyone for that matter, is a Sufi and he seeks to be recognised as “a saint” or “a hero” among people is like saying Mr X is tall and short at the same time, or that he is at the

same time a Christian and a Muslim. Therefore, those who are convinced that Yassine is craving for “leadership” or being regarded as “a hero”, should at least stop speaking about his Sufi origin, practices and ideas in order to avoid self-evident contradiction.

In 1972 and 1973 Sheikh Yassine published two books: the first is called *Al-Islam byna ad-Da'wa wa ad-Dawla* [Islam between the Call and the State] (480 pages); and the second, a quite voluminous one (950 pages) is entitled *Al-Islam Ghadan* [Islam Tomorrow]. In these two books he discusses a wide range of topics, stressing the dire need for reform in Morocco and, more importantly, the method or the way to achieve the required reform smoothly and peacefully. He also emphasized the need to educate the people considering them the decisive factor in any attempt to reform Muslim societies. In the mean time he warns against violence, which he rejects by temperament as well as by principle, as a means to achieve social and political reforms.

There is no space here to go into the issues explored in these two voluminous works, but a few remarks may be in order. The first thing that may strike the reader is the kind of topics being investigated, and from this it is not hard to come to the conclusion that Yassine's rupture with the Zawiya traditions and restrictions is as good as complete. His field of interest has now enlarged to include the society as a whole instead of focusing on himself only and being confined within the boundaries of the Zawiya and its affairs. The second point a cautious reader cannot fail to note has to do with the way he expounds his ideas in these two books. We can already discern that he is trying to work out a comprehensive vision of the deep change he expects to take place in Morocco, though this vision is substantially reviewed in his later writings.²² A third point concerns a section of the wide and diversified audience he is targeting and the message he intends to bring home. But it could not be said that his project at this stage is revolutionary, for at the time, when he wrote those books, he still hoped the reform might come from the top. It never did and Yassine had to think of something else.

2.3 A bold initiative

When Yassine noticed that the regime had not taken note of his suggestions and no steps had been taken to prevent the situation in the country from getting worse, he thought of an initiative to convey his message clearly and secure the conditions for his voice to be heard. This was considered to be very important, if not unavoidable, in order for him to say for sure whether there was any political will to undertake the required reforms or not. He talked to some close friends about his intention to write an open letter to King Hassan II. Only two, Muhammad al-Alawi and Ahmad al-Mallakh, agreed to the idea whereas others tried to deter him, claiming that the prevailing circumstances were not suitable and the monarch would not tolerate such an initiative, all the more so as he had just been the target of two attempted coups. Yassine had a different view and went on with his project, a letter of more than 110 pages which he completed and published in 1974.

What is astonishing about this letter, which is highly admired by many, dismissed by some as “suicidal”, and described by others, in a rather typically English tone, as “not very diplomatic”,²³ is not only its language which “clearly reflects Yassine’s elegant style and confident command of the language”²⁴ but also its content which would take no small amount of courage and confidence in order to compose and address to a king like Hassan II.

My letter is unlike any other you have received so far. It renders an answer obligatory, and even your silence will be an eloquent response. Perhaps you will read it as potentates read letters from common people, but you will have to respond to it [in one way or another]...

No matter what your answer might be, ...you will not be able to forbid the word of truth and justice which I proclaim. (...) You should know that God, the Glorious, cannot be vanquished, and that He may task the weakest of his servants with a great mission...and [may I add that] I am that humble, weak servant.²⁵

Trying to revive an Islamic tradition, that is, the duty of Muslim scholars to give *Annassihah* (advice) to rulers when they get involved in acts of oppression or allow unjust practices, Yassine raises in his letter a number of sensitive issues such as the concept of *bay’ah* (oath of allegiance) and how it has been manipulated by the

king and cloaked in rituals and ceremonies which, to say the least, are humiliating to human dignity:

Has it ever occurred to you that every man has his dignity, and he whom you obliged to prostrate himself before you, in front of everyone and on television curses you in his heart because of your contempt for human dignity? You must be mad if you think that those who are at your service adore you, and prostrate themselves out respect for your person and the kingdom.²⁶

He also denounces the king's extravagant life-style and his squandering of the country's resources whereas the majority of Moroccans are floundering about in poverty. He warns him against the dangers that beset the country and invites him to take genuine steps and implement the reforms that Morocco is in dire need of. He stresses that he should follow the example of great leaders such as Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz (682 – 720)²⁷ in the Islamic history and prove his sincerity through deeds and not words. In brief, it could be said that the king's true character, not the image he carved for himself and inflated and embellished all the more by a phalanx of flatters around him, is being exposed to the public and commented on in the clearest way possible.

The other major issue dealt with in Yassine's letter and to which he devotes a whole chapter concerns the scholarly community.²⁸ This raises the question as to the rationale behind targeting an institution which in effect had no power. Why should it be implicated when it was the king, as it was well known, who ruled and made all the decisions? To answer this question, a bit of cultural and historical backdrop should prove helpful.

If we examine Islamic history, it should be crystal clear that specialists in the matter of religion, commonly called *Ulama*, have always been of great importance to Muslim societies. Though they have never developed into a clerical institution similar to the one defined by Christianity in the Middle Ages, their importance have never been questioned. The reason, as Hudson has put it, is that "Islam in the Arab world ...permeates the daily life of the individuals with its ritualistic obligations...it affects personal status [and] it plays a political role."²⁹ Thus it is only natural that the role of Islamic scholars, given their specialisation in the field, should continue to

wield special significance. Their consultation is sought and their views, albeit not always put into effect, are requested not only on personal matters but also on social, commercial, financial and political affairs.

In Morocco, until the early decades of the twentieth century, the *Ulama* had maintained a significant share of influence which sometimes outweighed that of the monarch himself, as manifested by their active role in the deposition of Sultan Mulay Abdel Aziz in 1908.³⁰ Though such cases are not frequent, they nevertheless attest to the potential power and respect the *Ulama* could command.

When Hassan II ascended the throne in 1961, he was fully aware of the challenging power the *Ulama* could pose, and since he knew only too well that his despotic tendencies and policies would most likely provoke the anger and the protest of Moroccan scholars, or at least some of them, he adopted a number of strategies in order to keep them under tight control. This is not where to investigate those strategies in detail,³¹ but suffice it to say here that their end results were detrimental, probably more than the king had expected. Not only did the *Ulama* become submissive to an alarming degree and refrain from speaking against un-Islamic practices, but they also willingly functioned as a tool serving the interests of the monarchy and legitimising its policies.

Given the historical importance of the *Ulama* in Moroccan society, as explained briefly above, and the significant role they could play to put the country on the right track after a decades-long history of despotic rule, it is no wonder that Yassine should address them in his letter, though the bulk of criticism is levelled at the king. He regrets that they give up their noble duty and accept to be pawns in the hands of what he considered a corrupt ruler. Instead of speaking against moral, social and political degeneration and supporting the welfare of the community, they applaud the official discourse and endorse the regime's unpopular and unjust practices. If many young Moroccans turn to Marxist-Leninist ideologies,³² he argues, it is because of the court scholars' –"worms of the books", as described in an old saying– as well as the despotic ruler's tampering with Islam. Both are to

blame, he contends. He calls on them to repent and join forces in order to save the country.

When the king learnt about Yassine's letter, it came as no surprise that he was infuriated and so were the scholars of the state. What further exacerbated the king, however, was not only its content and the manner in which he was addressed but also the fact that it was made public. Yassine meant it. He wanted to make sure that the people were aware of the true story if anything unpleasant happened to him. Thus when he wrote his letter, he sent about two thousand copies by post to prominent people in the Moroccan society such as lawyers, *Ulama* (Islamic scholars), teachers, doctors,...whose details were taken from the phone book. Only a week later did he send two copies to Hassan II through the Governor of Marrakech.

The king's response to the letter was quick and harsh, though publicly he tried to ignore it in order to defuse its effects. He sent Yassine to a psychiatric hospital where he was detained for three and a half years without trial. His two companions Muhammad al-Alawi and Ahmad al-Malakh, who aided him in printing and distributing the letter, were interned in a secret detention centre in Casablanca for fifteen months. Harsh as it may be, some people find this punishment rather soft compared to what normally happens to anyone who dares take a similar initiative. As Munson points out, "Most Moroccans aware of Yassine's epistle of 1974 cannot believe that Hassan II did not have him killed."³³

Why did he take such a serious risk then? A number of explanations have been put forward. According to one, Yassine's letter should be put into its historical, social and political context in order to better understand the real motive of its author and the conditions which made the implementation of such an idea possible. In the early 1970s the military had tried at least twice to overthrow the monarchy but failed. The left had also made several attempts but without success. Meanwhile the Islamic resurgence had been gaining ground everywhere in the Arab and Islamic world, providing what was deemed a powerful tool to rebel against the ruling

establishment. Yassine seemed to have read the situation correctly and exploited it skilfully for his initiative.³⁴

Another explanation which is close to the one just referred to considers the initiative from another perspective. It maintains that with the collapse of the scholarly community in Morocco which began under the French colonial rule and continued during the reign of Hassan II, a space was created for the reinvention of the Moroccan tradition of *Nasiha* [advice to the ruler]. Yassine, as implied by this theory of “empty space”, only seized the opportunity to fill the void and managed, in the view of others, to turn himself into the figure of a hero and martyr.³⁵

A slightly different explanation from the second speaks about what it calls “the concentrated challenge”. The argument here is that since the breakdown of the scholarly establishment “enabled religio-political authority to be concentrated in the figure of the king, then the same developments enabled a similarly concentrated challenge to the throne after independence.”³⁶ Accordingly, Yassine and his famous letter to the King Hassan II may well represent this “concentrated challenge”.

The problem with these three explanations is that they do not tell us in any convincing manner why Yassine was the only person who had spotted such a “valuable moment” and exploited it for his project. Were there not other religious Moroccans among a population of about 20 million at the time who were at least as clever as Yassine? If the moment was “suitable for challenging the king”, as claimed, why did not other Moroccan Islamists rush for the opportunity or at least follow suit? Though it cannot be denied that there were some attempts, albeit limited, it cannot be denied either that they were dealt with immediately and easily. There are a plethora of questions to challenge the suggested explanations above, and if we could agree with some of the descriptive aspects of their argument, it would be hard, given the available facts, to accept the substance of their conclusions.

A fourth explanation attempts the field of mythology to account for the letter which made the case of its author a cause celebre. It postulates that Yassine's initiative to write directly to the king in the special manner he did, seemed to be the only option available at the time in order for Yassine to appropriate the image of "the saintly scholar willing to stand up defiantly against the corrupt sultan."³⁷ The purport of the argument is that Yassine was desperately in need to build up the required personal charisma for his political success, and to achieve this end he resorted to an old myth, that is, "the myth of the righteous man of God". What may corroborate this theory, it is argued, is that much of Yassine's popular support is derived from this image.

For those who are not familiar with the Islamic religion, culture and civilization and Arabic language, this explanation might pass unnoticed or at least be considered as one possibility among others. However, if it is examined from an Islamic perspective, it simply cannot be accepted. The core of the matter is that the debate triggered by Yassine's initiative is not predicated on a common platform. It rather involves two spheres which are basically distinct, though common points cannot be ruled out. Each has its own logic which differs significantly from the other. Unless we take this into account, discussion of issues of the sort we are considering may continue as long as we want and theories may proliferate, but this would not serve in any meaningful way sound scholarship and mutual understanding. I need not add that to understand does not necessarily mean to agree; and to disagree does not automatically entail grabbing at whatever comes to imagination; and to meet the academic standards does mean attacking indiscriminately, using whatever comes to hand.

That said, let us consider briefly the simple, but not trivial, reasons behind Yassine's initiative which remains, whether we agree or not, no small feat. Drawing on Yassine's writings and interviews, a number of reasons could be identified. First, he meant to remind the *Ulama* of their traditional role as the guardians of the *Sharia* and their duty to enjoin good and forbid evil. That is why a complete chapter in his letter was devoted to them. The intended message is that if the *Ulama* do not speak against the evil of corruption which is widespread at all levels, as King

Hassan himself admitted in a broadcast on 20th August 1970³⁸, against the grinding poverty from which many people are suffering, against humiliation to which the Moroccan people are being subjected when they go hospital to see a doctor or when they to go to any government building to ask for an administrative service, however small it may be,...if they do not speak against these evils, then when are they expected to react?

A second reason for writing the open letter to the monarch was that Yassine sought to revive a traditional Islamic practice called *an-nassihah* (frank advice, counsel) which the *Ulama* were supposed to offer rulers to ensure they conform to the basic principles of Islam which stress, among other things, a just form of government and fair distribution of wealth. According to Islamic teachings when *an-nassihah* involves an unjust ruler, it is considered the best type of *jihad*, and if as a consequence the person undertaking such an initiative is killed, he is regarded the best of martyrs.³⁹ It is a practice through which the *Ulama* could exercise their traditional role vis-à-vis the ruling power and reduce the chance of outright authoritarianism which is the root cause of the plight affecting Muslim societies to this day.

A third reason is that Yassine thought that the shock effect of the letter might lead the king to reconsider his ways and undertake the required reforms. Yassine was not totally unrealistic, for he had in mind examples of some Muslim rulers who, despite inheriting power, proved capable of radical change. Umar ibn Abdelaziz, the Ummayyad Caliph, is a case in point.

A fourth reason is that Yassine seemed to prefer the top-down approach to reform because he thought it would secure the cooperation and involvement of all in the process and thus save Morocco time, energy, resources and, above all, the prospect of being dragged into internal conflicts which were in nobody's interest. Despite the appealing advantages of such an approach, King Hassan seemed determined to maintain the status quo, and Sheikh Yassine decided to take another course of action.

2.4 A change of strategy

When Sheikh Yassine regained his freedom in March 1978, he tried to deliver some religious talks in a local mosque not far from his house, but the authorities soon intervened and stopped him. He denounced what he considered an attempt to silence him or to prevent him from having contact with people. Since then, his house was going to be a point of attraction for many people not only from Marrakech, the city where he was still living, but also from all over Morocco.

To be sure, knowing that his house was closely monitored, not many people could show up at the beginning, but with the passage of time their number increased, though the purposes of their visit were not necessarily the same. While some visitors came just of curiosity to meet the man who had the courage to stand up against King Hassan II, others wanted to find out about his views regarding certain issues and what should be done to overcome the problems facing the Islamic groupings at the time, particularly their fragmentation and apparent ineffectiveness.

It may be worth noting here that while Sheikh Yassine was still in detention, a serious incident happened which had a very negative impact on the Islamic landscape. In 1975 Omar Benjelloun, a member of the political bureau of the Socialist Union of the Popular Forces (USFP), was assaulted and killed in front of his house in Casablanca. The Moroccan regime claimed that the Islamic Youth Association, founded by Abdelkarim Motii, former inspector of primary education, was implicated in the assassination. Motii, however, denied this accusation claiming that it was a plot staged by the Moroccan authorities to get rid of him as well as of the leftist activist Omar Benjelloun.⁴⁰

Whatever the situation might be, the consequences of that tragic incident were detrimental to Islamic revivalism in Morocco. Sheikh Yassine contemplated the whole scene and thought that perhaps the best thing to do was to get in touch with the various Islamic associations and see if they could join forces and merge into a single organization, for the prevailing fragmentation and the resulting weakness only played in the hands of the regime.

The project seemed appealing and, in order to campaign for it, Sheikh Yassine started in 1979 an Islamic journal which he called “*Aljamaa*” [the group], which is very revealing. It was meant to be the prelude for a direct contact with Islamic groups, scholars, mosque preachers and whoever might be interested in the project. Despite its modest appearance, and despite being obstructed and even frequently confiscated by the authorities, the journal did reach many readers, albeit usually from hand to hand.

Meanwhile Yassine and/ or other people who supported his idea undertook several trips to different Moroccan cities, met leaders or prominent members of other Islamic groups as well as some independent Islamic figures and tried to persuade them to overcome the prevailing factionalism and work together to save the country. Unfortunately, the response was not very encouraging, to say the least. Sheikh Yassine was reluctant to add, as he would put it, a new element to an already fragmented scene,⁴¹ but left with not other option, he finally agreed to establish an association which officially saw the light of day in September 1981.

However, to start an association was not all that mattered to launch an organized Islamic action. What was more important was the guiding principles and the line of thinking to be adopted and where to be positioned regarding certain issues upon which Moroccan Islamists seemed to disagree a great deal at the time. In fact, the problem of factionalism dominating the Islamic landscape then was largely due to differences of opinion on some of those issues. Hence, convinced that knowledge should precede action, as the saying has it, and that clarity was the best policy, Yassine thought it was the moment to begin publishing what he called *al-Minhaj an-Nabawi* (The Prophetic Method), a book of which the first part appeared indeed in *al-Jamaa Journal*, No.8, in 1981. We will discuss later some of its features, but here I will try to sum up some of the guiding principles raised in *al-Minhaj an-Nabawi* and see how they helped to clarify in advance the identity, so to speak, and the image of the newly-born group.

First, Yassine stresses in the clearest way possible that violence is to be rejected categorically whatever the circumstances, and as if to reassure the sceptics, he

reiterates on various occasions that it is a question of principle based on Prophetic recommendations as is clear from the following: “God is gentle and likes gentleness and he rewards for gentleness what he does not reward for harshness or anything else.”⁴² The topic is tackled later in other Yassine’s works and speeches.

Second, he also rejects underground activism and speaks about his intention to seek legal recognition and be allowed to express openly his ideas and opinions. He explains that to go underground would only serve the ruling authorities which may at any moment fabricate anything against their opponents and crack down on them without any fear of a backlash from the public opinion and human rights organizations. It is worth noting that this idea which is now widely accepted was not so evident at the time. Some Islamists claimed that the new comer, i.e Yassine, had no experience and was not aware of the consequences of what he was doing and saying. In some extreme cases he was accused of working for the Palace and Zionism to uncover Islamists and render them an easy target for the regime.

Third, Yassine speaks about the necessity to be independent organizationally and financially. He points out to the detrimental consequences of being manipulated by any foreign or domestic force. Thus he and his group have never accepted or received any financial aid from the rich Gulf region, for example, or any other foreign country. They believed that their stances are, and should always remain, in line with their ideals and according to the best of their judgement. This is considered one of the strengths of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, that is, its capacity to maintain its autonomy. The Moroccan authorities have been constantly on the watch, yet, they have never established any organizational or financial link between the movement and any foreign power.

Forth, he emphasises that neither he nor any one for that matter has a monopoly on understanding Islam or an exclusive representation of Muslims. He criticises those who claim that their group is the only Islamic one and the rest are wrong and should be dismantled or adhere to theirs. It is a kind of narrow-mindedness for which there is no justification. It is true that there are some aspects so explicit that

no two Muslims can disagree upon, but there are other issues which are open to interpretation. Such being the case, no interpretation could be claimed to be more valid than others. Only time and practice can tell in such cases which is more accurate than which.

Fifth, despite some unpleasant practices, argues Yassine, Moroccan society cannot be claimed to be completely disconnected from Islam. The Moroccan people are highly respectful of, and still attached to their religion in general, though the degree of understanding and commitment may differ from one person to another. The point here is meant to refute the idea of ascribing *jahiliya* to Muslim societies. This concept, which will be discussed in chapter 4 of this thesis, was a recurrent theme in some Islamists' writings. The endeavours of Sheikh Yassine to keep away young Moroccans from such an extreme interpretation are now well known.

Sixth, he makes it clear that he is for gradual change, flexibility and dialogue as a way of settling differences or searching for a common platform to undertake the reforms the country is badly in need of. A long history, he argues, of mismanagement, authoritarianism, and corruption cannot be settled overnight, but it is crucial that there should be a clear agenda, an adequate approach and a sound beginning.

Seventh, he emphasises moral and spiritual education as well as scholarly training, effective organization and civic and political engagement. He believes that to focus on one aspect of Islam at the expense of others would not help to revive Islam or create the conditions conducive for the liberation of an *Umma* which has been under the yoke of authoritarianism for centuries. He knows that there are those who would misunderstand his insistence on spiritual education as proof of the continuing influence of, and yearning for his former Sufi experience, but Yassine would not be deterred by what he regards unfounded claims. The movement he has in mind should be broad in its scope and even politics, notwithstanding its importance, should only be part of its mission, but not all that matters.⁴³

In sum, with the publication of *al-Minhaj an-Nabawi* (the Prophetic Method) and the dissemination of its signposts some of which have been referred to above, it could be said that the conditions for starting an organised action had been completed. The next step, as it will be shown in the next chapter, was to move from theory to practice, that is, to translate a project which until then was only committed to paper on the ground.

2.5 Conclusion

The trajectory of Yassine's own life since his early childhood till the moment he became politically engaged provides us with a number of clues as to the nature of his project, how it started and developed and the factors that contributed to shaping his choices over the years. Though his early education was traditional, he could not be identified with the common image of the Moroccan *Alim* (scholar) confined to his traditional concerns and tamed and subjected to unprecedented state control. Taking advantage of his talents, Yassine learnt to speak and write in different languages, got familiar with European culture and history and assimilated issues and theories of special interest in various fields of knowledge. This, in addition to his Islamic studies, had its bearing on his perception of Muslim society and what he would suggest for its rejuvenation and progress.

His career pathway, besides allowing him to travel a lot and see the world, gave him the opportunity to explore an area of interest considered vital for development and progress, i.e. the education sector. It enabled him to acquire valuable expertise from which he benefited a great deal to devise the educational programme he set for the members of his movement.

His Sufi experience constitutes another highly significant factor in developing his theory for social and political reform as well as for the revival of Islam in Morocco and elsewhere, in Arab and Muslim countries. The logic of the theory and approach he adopted brought him face to face with an authoritarian monarch. It was a test and the success he achieved has made many people trust his ideas, namely about how to build up and improve the personality of the Muslim so that he and she could

positively and peacefully get engaged, whatever the sacrifices and the circumstances, in reforming their society, fearing none but God.

The next chapter will focus on *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* and see, not how it developed as an idea in the mind of its leader for over a decade, but how it emerged, put into action and managed to secure a sure place in the Moroccan society. We will see how it started and took shape in a stifling political environment and how it has coped with its internal and external concerns.

Chapter 3 Emergence and Development of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* [Justice and Spirituality]

A popular joke in Morocco says that once King Hassan's son, Prince Mohammad, was attending school for a geography lesson when his teacher asked him to name a few countries on a blank map of the world. He identified a few correctly, but when the teacher pointed to Morocco, the prince answered: "That's dad's farm!"¹

This joke of which even some Western observers have made note gives an idea about how the conception of power is perceived by the Moroccan ruling monarchy. Yassine set out in 1981 to challenge that conception, not merely through writing as he had done before, but practically, on the ground, creating thus "an unprecedented equation" that the king might not resolve as easily as expected. What seemed particularly intriguing about the new-comers, i.e. Yassine and his group, was that though their number was very modest – about twenty persons in total– they were outspoken in their criticism of the monarch's policies, raising issues deemed until then taboo and talking "naively" and clearly about their intentions and aspirations some of which the prevailing political climate could hardly accommodate.

To be sure a curious struggle between two opposing wills was about to occur. One was represented by the king who was determined to keep everything and everybody under a tight grip as he had done since he took office in 1961 and the other was represented by Yassine who was determined to challenge openly what he viewed as an illegitimate system of rule and to call for a new Islamic political order where monarchical authoritarianism had no place. The former claimed to have a *fatwa* attributed to the Maliki school of thought authorising him to liquidate one third of the population if found on the wrong side in order to preserve the remaining two thirds;² the latter was motivated by the example of the best of martyrs and by what he described as "this ambition which goes beyond limits...to please God."³ The former had at his disposal all the secret intelligence and the

coercive means which had indeed enabled him to inflict upon opponents and dissidents cruel and unheard-of forms of punishment; the latter was armed with a strong conviction that the weakest of creatures might be tasked with the noblest mission, and this, he thought, applied to his case.⁴ What would the latter do in an attempt to secure the conditions to advance his project and what would the former employ to thwart such endeavours?

This chapter will cover a period of about three decades and we will see how Yassine and his group made their debut and got established in a political space dominated by a single person, faithful as always to the idea of “his private farm” and where opposition forces, whether from the army, the political or the Islamic spheres, were either neutralised, coopted or silenced and domesticated. In the first section of this chapter we will explore the movement’s endeavours to cope with this challenge since its inception in 1981 until it took a new name, *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, in 1987. The second section will cover almost twelve years, until King Hassan II passed away, bringing into light the regime’s new strategies which culminated in different forms of repression and the impact of such a policy on the movement. The third section will deal with the period beginning in 1999, when the new king, Mohammad VI, ascended the throne until the present time. We will examine whether a change of the ruling team entailed a rupture with what is termed “*les années de plomb*” [the years of lead] or a continuity of the same old policies in different forms towards political opponents in general and *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* in particular. The final section, however, seeks to examine the inside, so to speak, of the movement and see how it started and developed in terms of organizational structure over the last three decades. Thus, a further step will have been taken to understand *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* and its project.

3.1 An outspoken voice under a modest banner

When Sheikh Yassine founded his association in September 1981, he seemed to have taken the right step at the right time. Many analysts would not fail to notice from a brief survey of the political history of Morocco that the 1980s were marked by a certain void due to a number of factors. King Hassan, who had been on the

throne since 1961, fought ferociously and used scores of strategies in order to bring all “the troublemakers” into the fold.⁵ After two attempted coups in 1971 and 1972 respectively, he managed eventually to neutralise the army and lure them to consider a better alternative to be safe and successful in life. “Make money, but don’t do politics,” he once said in a speech addressed to his officers.⁶ The message, as it was understood, was that everything, even if unethical, could be tolerated in the pursuit of money as long as politics was shunned or, in other words, the position of the monarch was not targeted.

The left also had made several attempts to get rid of the monarchy or at least to reduce its prerogatives extensively, but after their repeated failure and in consequence of the violent blows they had received, they finally accepted to operate from within the system and abide by the rules of the game which the king had carefully crafted in order to always be the victor and inculcate in the minds and souls of his subjects the notion of the king’s “private farm”. Other personalities, despite their acknowledged past political and intellectual activism, changed direction completely, one after the other, and vied to put their talents and skills at the service of his Majesty. No wonder that political apathy set in and continued to spread rapidly.⁷

As for the *Ulama*, they had long been transformed into pawns in the monarch’s hands, using them when and where it best served his interests. Despite a sustained policy fostering moral degeneration and social injustice, the *Ulama* made no comment. The Commander of the Faithful told them not to interfere in politics adding that “it should not be their concern if the price of any commodity went up.”⁸ And they obeyed. Islamic groupings in the late 1970s and early 1980s were in no better situation. They were weak, disorganised, fragmented and with no clear strategy; the first serious organised action undertaken by Abdelkarim Moti was nipped in the bud, after the controversial assassination of the leftist activist Omar Benjelloun.

The major challenge, however, that seemed to disturb this “superb political quietism” came from the poverty-stricken strata of society which were getting wider

and wider. Serious riots had already broken in Casablanca, the largest city in Morocco, in 1965 and the same thing happened again in the same city in 1981 and in numerous places in 1984. Though they were crushed quickly, leaving in their wake thousands of victims, the social and economic problems of Morocco were nowhere near to be eased for various reasons. A costly armed conflict with the Polisario Front in Western Sahara, four successive years of severe drought, an alarming rise in foreign debt and the introduction of a structural adjustment programme [SAP] as recommended by the IMF and the World Bank to rectify the country's failing finances in addition to a long period of mismanagement, wrong policies and widespread corruption... all of which combined to make the lives of the majority of people more vulnerable and thereby exacerbate social tension.⁹ To be sure, the need for serious reform could hardly be overstressed. The problem is that those who were expected to pressure for it were less and less visible, and this made the search for a viable alternative an utmost necessity. Could the emergence of an Islamic movement be a suitable response?

Yassine believed so, and this is why he wished he could have set up, in cooperation with other Islamic groups, a single, large organization in order for the Islamists to be in a better position to press for the social and political change the Moroccan people were longing for. That did not happen, as explained in the second chapter, and Yassine had to start from scratch.¹⁰ However, he did not give up all hope and in order to emphasize that his original intention was still alive and serious, he chose for his newly formed group a modest name: *Usrat al-jamaa* [i.e. literally "a family" within a larger group]. He also wanted to make it clear, right from the beginning, that this group did not claim to have a monopoly on the representation of Islam, or that their interpretations were the only ones that mattered.¹¹

According to the Moroccan law any group of individuals can set up a legally recognized association. They have just to complete some simple legal formalities. Well, this is in theory, but the practice is something else, and the case of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* is one example, among many others, that shows the wide discrepancy between the official discourse and what takes place on the ground. When the

board members sought to officially declare the association of *al-Jamaa* on 15th October 1982, the Moroccan authorities refused to recognize it. Another attempt was made on 26th April 1983 under a new name, *Jamayat al-jamaa al-khayriya*, but again in vain.¹²

However, the founding members would not stay cross-handed and “wait for Godot”. They moved on using the scant resources available to them at the time in order to get their voice and views heard and, why not, heeded. They used their own homes as their meeting places and relied on their own pockets to pay for their expenses and to fund their small activities. Nobody, not even the founders themselves, believed that the movement would expand so rapidly in such a short time.

The Moroccan authorities were not indifferent to, or unaware of what was going on. They kept a close watch on the association’s external activities and in some cases impeded or even banned them. For instance, when the *al-Jamaa* organized the first spring camp in 1982 in a place near al-Bir al-Jadid, about 30 miles south of Casablanca, the authorities intervened and stopped it. The same thing happened again when a second camp was organized in the summer of 1982. It is an official policy which started then and has never changed to this day. What they rarely tried to obstruct, however, was the meetings which took place inside the members’ houses. Perhaps the Moroccan government at the time thought that the *al-Jamaa* was still very small and as such did not yet constitute any serious threat to the regime.

In November 1983, the *al-Jamaa* took a further step and issued a new publication entitled *as-Subh* [the Dawn] with the aim of making it a daily newspaper later on; but after its second issue was published in the same month, it was confiscated and the paper was banned definitely. Another publication with the title of *al-Khitab* [the Discourse] was launched in January 1984, a move which meant among other things that Yassine and his group would not give up and they would continue to struggle for their legitimate rights. The reaction of the authorities was so quick and

stopped *al-Khitab* after its first issue, possibly to prove that they, too, were not to be defeated easily.

On 27th December 1983, about two years after *al-Jamaa*'s inception, Mr Yassine was arrested on the pretext of what was published in the *as-Subh* newspaper. The real reason, however, for the arrest was Yassine's commentary on "Message of the Century" which King Hassan had addressed the previous month to the presidents and kings of the Arab and Islamic world on the eve of the fifteenth century of the Islamic calendar.¹³ In a long article entitled "Words and Deeds" and published in *al-Jamaa Journal*, Sheikh Yassine criticised strongly the king's Message, highlighting the discrepancy between official words and deeds and how the actual practices were in stark contrast to the declared policies.¹⁴

When Yassine's article appeared, the Moroccan authorities did not react immediately most probably to defuse its effects, but the publication of *as-Subh* newspaper seemed to provide them with an opportunity to kill more than one bird with one stone. Firstly, they would deprive the association from an outlet through which it could convey its ideas and reach out to a wider audience; secondly, they would seek to discipline a troublemaker who, despite his late three and a half year internment, was not deterred from crossing the red lines set by the regime; and thirdly, an early crackdown on a nascent, Islamic opposition movement was expected to nip it in the bud, especially when an important figure like Sheikh Yassine was removed from the scene.

Things, however, did not evolve as the authorities had planned but ironically enough proved beneficial for the *al-Jamaa* movement in many ways. One significant gain was achieved at the political and the human rights level. Yassine's trial, widely believed to be politically motivated, was covered by many national and international media outlets and human rights reports. Though some articles on Yassine's ideas and his group may not, at least in the eyes of the *al-Jamaa* members, be very friendly or neutral, most of them acknowledged that a strong opposition force to the regime of King Hassan was in the making. Thus, the political weight of *al-Jamaa* was enhanced significantly.

A second one was that Yassine's trial and imprisonment provided the movement with an opportunity to increase its base. Many people had never heard of Yassine and his group until he was incarcerated and his story received wide media coverage. Once convinced that he was a victim of injustice, many Moroccans naturally got angered and sought to express their sympathy in one way or another. Whereas some translated their support into financial aid or volunteered some services, others went further and got fully engaged into the movement. Ironically, Yassine's imprisonment which was expected to scare away people from *al-Jamaa* only increased sympathizers and supporters and raised the interest of journalists, researchers and the like.

A third benefit concerned the development of *al-Jamaa* itself. There is no doubt that the sudden disappearance of the founding leader of any social, political or religious organization, particularly in the first formative years, can have its negative impact, even with the existence of a clear ideological basis. The association of *Al-Jamaa* cannot claim to be an exception. When Sheikh Yassine was jailed in December 1983, most members at the time were very young and they were not on the same level in terms of their understanding of the whole vision and the strategy of *al-Jamaa*. A number of questions were raised and some members were not satisfied with the answers that were provided. To be sure, it was a real test for the movement's leadership while Yassine was behind the bars. It required a great deal of effort to solve some thorny problems and cope with certain misconceptions to such an extent that some members of the leading council considered that it was only after Yassine's imprisonment that the real birth of the movement took place.¹⁵ Whatever doubts persisted in the minds of some members were definitely dispelled when Sheikh Yassine regained his freedom and approved of all the decisions taken by the leading council during his detention.

The Moroccan authorities might have realized that they had made the wrong decision when they ordered Yassine's imprisonment in December 1983; yet, like all autocratic regimes, they never lost hope of crushing an opposition force which seemed different from the ones they had dealt with so far. Therefore, they adopted other strategies, if not to eradicate the movement altogether, at least to reduce its

influence to a minimum. For many months after Yassine's release on 31st December 1985, members and visitors who came to Sheikh Yassine's house were subject to all sorts of harassment. Some were rudely treated; others were threatened and warned not to come again; still others' identity cards were kept in order to be called later and interrogated by the police once they were back home. As far as *al-Jamaa* was concerned, it would not be intimidated by such practices; on the contrary, these only boosted its cohesion as well as its morale and determination to continue to struggle for its legitimate rights. What was even more encouraging, according to some accounts, was that a growing number of people of all ages, albeit the majority of them were young, felt emboldened and were increasingly interested in the movement.

By the end of 1987, it could be said that the movement, hitherto called *Usrat al-Jamaa*, had successfully passed through the first period of its establishment and had managed not only to overcome the major obstacles created by the *Makhzen* authorities to impede its emergence in the first place and its subsequent natural growth but also to secure a firm place in the social and political firmament of Morocco. However, the name by which it was called did not seem congruent with these developments and all the more so as the hope of a unified Islamic organization was nowhere near to be materialised. Such being the case, the leadership decided it was time to take up a new name able to better reflect the social, political and Islamic outlook of the movement.

3.2 Getting established under a new name

"What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet."¹⁶ Yet, not many seem to subscribe to this Shakespearean idea. People from various faiths and cultures have always tried to choose what they consider good names for whatever they hold dear, whether their babies, businesses, residences, pets, associations or anything of the sort. When the leadership of *Usrat al-Jamaa* wanted to adopt a new name, they considered a few suggestions before they decided on "*al-Adl wal-Ihsan*" (Justice and Spirituality). The reasons behind this choice are explained in a letter which Sheikh Yassine addressed to the

members of the movement on 2nd *Dhi al-Hijja* 1407 corresponding 28 July 1987.

Here are some excerpts:

When the first issue of *al-Jamaa Journal* saw the light of day, readers found in it a sincere call for the unity of the Islamist groups in Morocco. We tried for years, before and after that, to come together, cooperate and join efforts to overcome the prevailing factionalism. And when we put forward *The Prophetic Method*, at the centre of our thinking there was “the national community” and how it should be established and organized was our contribution to the aspired unity.

When what we expected did not materialize, we proceeded to found an Islamic association, hoping that it would only add a brick to the edifice of Islamic unity.

The name which we then gave to our newly formed group “*Usrat al-Jamaa*” translated our intention to affiliate to the expected “national community”; it regarded us as part of a whole and furthermore the name in and by itself implied a high degree of self-denial, for it merely pointed to a small group of people around a modest journal called *al-Jamaa*.¹⁷

Then he explains how “the issues of *al-adl* (justice) and *ihsan* are both emphatically stressed in the Quran: “*God enjoins justice and Ihsan*”.¹⁸ He also maintains that these two concepts can comfortably accommodate the programme and the major objectives of the movement. If *al-adl* stands for the necessity to work for a just political system in Morocco, *al-Ihsan* stands for another dimension which is equally important, that is, the individual’s moral and spiritual perfection. Thus, *al-Ihsan* in Yassine’s vision cannot be separated from *al-Adl* and to stress further their importance, he writes:

We will be torn apart if we are faced with a serious obstacle and we do not have *Ihsan*. Our endeavours will fail if the issue of justice does not figure in our programme. Indeed the issue of justice should be given pride of place in our agenda.¹⁹

Several activities were organized to explain to members and sympathizers the reasons for picking up a new name, though all took place in the members’ dwelling houses. As for the Moroccan authorities, they cared much less about what the movement chose to be called than about its plans and what it sought to achieve. Consequently, they tried to block all ways to prevent it from communicating with a wider audience. Its senior members, despite their acknowledged scholarly qualifications, were denied the right to give lectures or talks in the mosques or in any other public places. It is no wonder that one of the priorities of the movement

at that time was how to break the blockade imposed by what was considered a despotic policy.²⁰

Thus a number of publications and audio cassettes and video tapes were produced and distributed widely between December 1985 and December 1989, the year when Sheikh Yassine was put under house arrest and members of *Majlis al-Irshad* [the Guidance Council]²¹ were arrested and jailed for the following two years. Sheikh Yassine alone published five books during that period: *Islam and the Challenge of Marxism-Leninism* (June 1987), *Outstanding Men* (January 1989), *Islam and Secular Nationalism* (October 1989), *Notes on Fikh and History* (though it was not distributed until 1990). In addition to these books, from 1st November 1989 until 27th December 1989 Sheikh Yassine delivered a series of nine talks in his house to members of the movement in which he gave his analysis and his views on Islamic history, highlighting the repercussions of some catastrophic events, namely the overthrow of the Islamic caliphate [about 30 years after the death of the Prophet] and the establishment in its stead of despotic hereditary rule from which the Islamic *Umma* has been suffering to this date. These speeches bearing the title “Talks on *al-adl wal-ihسان*” were recorded and distributed widely.

Another equally important series of talks given by Dr Mohamed Bachiri entitled “Promoting political awareness” and which, by 21st December 1989, had reached twenty-one, was also recorded and distributed all over the country. The use of these audio and video tapes proved very effective. They were easy to circulate, not very expensive and the chances to be heard and heeded were quite high. In fact, a great number of people learnt about *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* and sympathized with its stances or joined its ranks because of these tapes.

Angered by the movement’s apparent success to foil plans devised to hinder its growth and development, the authorities employed a plethora of new measures and tactics in the hope of improving their overall strategy to tighten their control over *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* and minimize its chances of becoming a real challenge to the regime. The first of these measures is that they put Sheikh Yassine under house arrest which lasted for ten years, from 30th December 1989 to the 16th May 2000.

During this period Sheikh Yassine was not allowed to meet anybody, not even his relatives, and the only way for him to keep in touch with the leadership of the movement was through letters which were leaked now and again from his house.

Then, in an attempt to completely isolate the movement from its leadership and create the conditions for its fragmentation, they also put members of the Guidance Council in prison for two years. It is a policy which the Moroccan regime had pursued successfully in dealing with many of its political opponents, namely the leftist groups. The long years of imprisonment, the lamentable conditions in detention centres, and the usual squabbles that are likely to break out among people living under the same roof, and the like factors could have their psychological effects on the prisoners whose disagreement upon certain issues could develop into an irremediable crisis. At least in the Moroccan case, it should not be surprising that the underlying factor that caused some parties to splinter could be traced back to the days when the leading members were incarcerated.

Soon afterwards, that is, on Wednesday 10th January 1990, *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* was banned without a court order; and to enforce this new arbitrary restriction, the Moroccan security forces arrested hundreds of members and brought them to the police stations to sign off on a ban on the movement as well as pledges not to organize or partake in any of its activities, threatening them with dire consequences if they did not comply. Since then an odd situation was created and has continued to this day: according to the laws in place, *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* has been set up properly and is thus legal, and there are dozens of court orders to this effect; yet, the security forces refuse to recognize this reality and insist that the movement is prohibited and therefore is not allowed to undertake any activity, whatever its nature.²²

Furthermore, in order to give a clear warning not only to the members and sympathizers but also to those who were thinking of joining the movement, a wave of arrests of selected members was carried out simultaneously in various towns and cities and during which many victims were ill-treated or tortured before they were set free or had to sign self-indicting statements under duress before

appearing in the court room to stand show trials. The sentences ranged between a few months to twenty years of imprisonment, and the obvious message was, of course, to show that the Moroccan regime was determined to deal Yassine's group a fatal blow.

As it is expected, these repressive measures were backed by an organized smear campaign against the movement and its leader in which a peculiar mix (salafists, leftists, Islamists, secularists...) participated vigorously. Thus many articles, CDs, and even books were published portraying Yassine as an ignorant Sufi, obscurantist, reactionary, utopist, lone dissenter, troublemaker, extremist, etc...whose main objective was to seize power and establish an archaic system of rule or what he called an "Islamic caliphate". To use a wide range of contradictory abusive phrases, terms and epithets in order to speak or write about the same and very person is clear evidence that the strange interest in Yassine was not sparked by any academic motives but rather by a determined intention to distort the image of a political opponent proved hard to tame or co-opt.²³

Such were some of the measures taken to restrain the growth and influence of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*. The question is: did such a policy work? Answers may differ but in the view of this author a number of indicators show that though it did create problems for the movement, its success was rather limited. One of these indicators was that the attempt to isolate the movement socially and politically did not yield the expected results. A great number of lawyers and human rights and political activists who, despite differences in ideology and political stances, supported the movement while its leadership and many of its members were being tried. This should come as no surprise because we were in the early 1990s, that is, before the opposition parties entered the government. It may be argued then that those who showed support for the movement had an axe to grind and were motivated more by their desire to embarrass the regime than by anything else. Be that as it may, what should be underlined here is that the expected isolation did not occur, though many variables might have come into play to explain that failure.

Another indicator was that the case of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* became for many successive months a recurrent subject in human rights and media reports inside and outside the country. It was referred to as an example, among many others, that confirmed the Moroccan regime's repeated violations of human rights and its scant regard for the rule of law. Undoubtedly, this is not what the authorities expected. What they did expect was that they would deal a fatal blow to *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* and that nobody would even take note, let alone denouncing the regime's oppressive practices towards "a common enemy".

A third indicator was that the crackdown on the movement only enhanced its cohesion, strengthened its organizational structure and increased the members' trust and confidence in their leadership. This may be explained in part by group dynamics theory which maintains that groups "tend to become cohesive when they are in intense competition with other groups or face serious external threat to their survival."²⁴

The last, but not least, indicator was that during that period *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* started another form of contestation to stress that it could not be silenced or ignored. Thus it took to the streets on various occasions and organized many demonstrations on its own or in cooperation with other political and trade union forces. A few examples of special significance deserve mention here :

1/ On 8th May 1990 *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* staged a sit-in in front of the parliament in support of the Guidance Council members who were standing trial before the Court of Appeal in Rabat. The significance of this event is that while a "political trial" was being conducted and hundreds of members who showed up to express their support peacefully were ill-treated or arrested, King Hassan II set up on this very day a Consultative Council for Human rights. Nothing could have belied the declared intention and highlighted the glaring contradiction between words and deeds than what happened there and then.

2/ On Friday 3rd August 1990, a sit-in coinciding with the "National day for Human Rights" took place in Ben Said mosque [not far from Yassine's house] in Sale to

protest the heavy sentences inflicted upon the Guidance Council members. Meanwhile, neighbouring Algeria was seething as the Islamic Salvation Front won 55 percent of the vote in local elections in June 1990. The Moroccan regime seemed to have taken the wrong move, putting the leaders of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* in prison and possibly to divert people's attention, the Minister of *Awkaf* and Islamic Affairs organized a conference on "Islamic Revival" in September 1990 and invited speakers from many Arab and Islamic countries. It was meant to be held annually but failing to achieve its aspired propagandistic goals, it was dropped after three attempts.

3/ On 1st May 1991, it was the first time trade unions in Morocco came out together in street demonstrations, and the participation of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* was so noticeable that it was claimed to have taken advantage of the 1st May celebration to display its strength. Actually something of the sort could not be denied, especially if we bear in mind the repression and harassment to which the movement was being subjected and the absence of any medium through which it could voice its grievances.

4/ On 19th August 1991, another big demonstration was organized in Casablanca, the biggest city in Morocco, to protest the arrest and the trial of a group of students from the Faculty of Medicine. These students belonged to the movement's Student Section and were arrested not because of their activities at the Faculty but rather to exert pressure on *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* leaders who were in jail in Sale to make fundamental concessions to be set free, the most prominent of which was to make a pledge of allegiance to the monarch and recognize him as Commander of the Faithful. The movement leaders rejected this categorically and, as a result, were left to complete their sentences. Many political prisoners, however, were amnestied at that time including Abraham Serfaty, a leading Moroccan Jewish dissident, whereas *al-Adl* members were excepted. Such a discriminating move, though hard, boosted the popularity of *al-Adl* further as a credible opposition force.

To be sure, these demonstrations, marches and sit-ins did provide *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* with an opportunity to exhibit its actual size, strength, organization and self-

discipline. Never did it get involved in an act of violence though on many an occasion the security forces intervened brutally, causing severe injuries to many members and in some cases permanent disabilities. To maintain self-control and shun violence whatever the provocation and in the mean time continue to speak loudly against the corrupt practices of an autocratic regime earned *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* the respect and admiration of many Moroccan people. No wonder that within two years, that is, from January 1990 to January 1992, the movement saw the greatest increase in its base since its inception in September 1981.²⁵

This growth, however, had its side-effects. One of these was how to accommodate the hundreds of new members and provide them with adequate training. It was a question for which there seemed to be no easy solution. Imagine, by way of example, a teacher, instead of being in charge of 10 pupils, found himself responsible for three hundred! What made the situation even more complicated was that the movement was not permitted to set up its own official headquarters, nor was it allowed to have access to public places. The only option left for the movement's members was to use their own houses where the number and frequency of meetings were rather limited. And even in this case, nothing was guaranteed. Now and again the security forces would intervene to break up some of those meetings; sometimes they would arrest all the attendees, take them to the police station for interrogation and release them later at night or the following day, or they would select some and send them to the court to be tried for holding illegal meetings and belonging to an illegal organization. Strangely enough, the Courts always dismissed those charges on the grounds that the movement of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* had been set up according to the existing laws and therefore could not be regarded as illegal.

To cope with the fallout of the sudden increase in the movement's following, a slogan which reads "Towards Balanced Expansion and Comprehensive Training" was raised immediately after the release of the Guidance Council members from prison in January 1992. Among the steps taken to put it into effect was the decision to slow down the process of membership and increase the number of workshops and training sessions for *Nakib al-Usara* [a person in charge of a group of 10-12

members] and *Nakib Shuaba* [who is in charge of a group ranging from 40 to 80 members]. It was also decided that each member should not be assigned various tasks. Other educational, organizational and management rules and techniques were also taken to adapt to the new circumstances.

Another equally important development occurred in 1997: a committee was set up to think about an institution to be charged with political matters, a political wing or something of the sort for *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*. In Marrakech, in the summer of 1998, the *Shura* Assembly approved formally the establishment of the political section of the movement. Since then endeavours to improve the performance of the various institutions and organs of the movement and ensure they could function smoothly have never stopped. It is not always easy as it sounds, especially if we take into account the prevailing oppressive political environment.

On the 23rd July 1999 King Hassan, who had been in poor health for six years or so, died. If some people mourned him and shed tears, others hoped that the misery and the misfortunes wrought by nearly four decades of authoritarian rule could finally be laid to rest. During the last twelve years of his reign, repression against *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* had intensified, but it had failed to achieve its major expected results. Hassan died, but the movement of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* survived. In the following section we will see how it has coped with “the new era” since it found out early enough that the demise of King Hassan did not entail the demise of his system of rule.

3.3 A “soft” letter to a new king and its consequences

When King Mohamed VI ascended the throne, he gave the impression he was going to break away from the old policies as well as the atrocities of his father’s rule and usher in a new era. His slogans and promises were widely believed and applauded. *Al-Adl wal-Ihsan* had a different view but, due to the high pitched optimism of that moment, it did not wish to talk about it then lest it be misunderstood. It did not want to be seen as seeking to take advantage of the delicate transition phase to further its own political agenda.

After about six months, however, during which many people insisted now and again that *Al-Adl wal-Ihsan* should clarify its position on the monarchy and its proclaimed new objectives, Sheikh Yassine addressed a letter in French of about 30 pages to the young king entitled *Mémoire, à qui de droit* [*Memorandum: To Whom it May Concern*]. In this letter, which was distributed on 28th January 2000, Sheikh Yassine cautions against the high expectations pinned on what was hailed as “a new era” and calls for concrete measures in order for the new promises to be trusted. It starts as follows:

The Young monarch, Mohamed VI, is clearly admired by young Moroccan people, who seemed to regard him as a friend, a symbol of liberation and a promise of a better future. During the first weeks of his reign, and wherever his inaugural campaign took him, the young king is greeted with genuine, youthful enthusiasm. (...)

The generously dispensed promises have generated intense excitement. However, beware of disillusionment if the youth, enchanted for a while and lulled by wild promises, sober up as the bleak prospects ahead remind them of their unenviable lot.²⁶

This letter, though small in size, soft in tone if compared with *Islam or the Deluge*, caused great uproar. It was attacked from all directions by left, right, Islamist and secular political parties besides official Arabophone and Francophone media outlets. The official *Ulama* went even further and described Yassine’s letter as an act of political and religious dissent, which meant that its author should be penalized for being “at odds with the national consensus.”²⁷ Other curious commentators were probing to find out about the real reasons for writing such a controversial letter. According to one explanation which, albeit strange, did circulate widely, the aim of the author was to provoke the Moroccan regime to maintain the house arrest because this would help him continue to promote the “victim image” of himself and his movement and thereby gain more supporters.

Admittedly, Yassine’s letter seemed to have upset the new ruling team who were trying to present what they called the “new era” with less tension and much fanfare. To explain further, it should be noted that the house arrest, imposed on Sheikh Yassine for over ten years, had long become meaningless and no longer served any purpose. The political parties whose credibility had hit the bottom felt

increasingly embarrassed to talk about the Moroccan democracy, the rule of law and the like slogans while an old man was illegally placed under house arrest. This had played into the hands of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* which was steadily regarded as the major opposition force in the country. Thus, when the new king came to power, he and his advisors sought to get rid of this thorny issue, but in a way that it served their own interests. On the one hand they would use it as a good signal of their intention to break away with the practices of the past; on the other they would deal with an embarrassing case which, apart from *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, served the interests of none.

What may support this explanation is that in the summer of 1999, a few months after Mohamed VI took office, the then royal palace spokesman, Hassan Awrid, met three leaders of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* in what was believed to be his father's house. He told them he was charged by the king himself to resolve the question of house arrest imposed on Sheikh Yassine for the last ten years. The leaders of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* explained to the king's envoy that the problem with the Moroccan regime could not be reduced to the house arrest of Sheikh Yassine. This is just part of the problem. To deal with the problem in its entirety, at least three points should be addressed: the first is that twelve student members who had been unjustly sentenced 20 years of imprisonment should be set free, and so should other Islamists who were in jail for no good reason; the second is the movement of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* should be allowed to operate freely like other political parties and organizations in Morocco; and the third point is that the house arrest on Yassine should be lifted immediately. Awrid, according to reliable sources, was not insensitive to the movement's demands, but he explained that he was not in a position to discuss what he called the whole "package" but only Sheikh Yassine's case.²⁸

This initiative simply failed; nonetheless, the *Makhzen* regime had to find a way to rid itself of what had truly become a burning issue. Acting on secret instructions from state officials, the question of Yassine's house arrest was raised in parliament on 10th May 2000. Ahmed Midaoui, who was then Minister of the Interior, denied that Yassine was under house arrest and that he, like other citizens, was free to go

wherever he liked. Sheikh Yassine took advantage of this declaration and issued a statement on 15th May 2000 to inform the public opinion of his intention to go out on 19th of the same month to attend the Friday prayer, which he did for the first time after more than 10 years.

However, the failure to settle the question of house arrest the way the *Makhzen* had originally planned and the failure of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* to hail the new incumbent monarch in one way or another in addition to the publication of *Memorandum: To Whom it May Concern* on 28th January 2000, all these factors combined seemed to uncover early enough what the new ruling team had in store for the Moroccan people in general and *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* in particular. Let's consider some components of the "new era" policy towards the movement of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* which started to take effect since then.

Under the reign of the late king, Hassan II, summer camping was the sole type of external activity which had somehow more or less been tolerated and to which *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* had brought a number of distinctive features. For instance in August 1998 and in July and August 1999, *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* organized six big summer camps in different places in Morocco. The success of these camps hardly needs to be proved. Suffice it to say that the number of campers reached in some cases over 70,000 and that especially in the summer of 1999 they made the headlines of many national and international media outlets. With the ascension of the new king to the throne, the Moroccan authorities, as if they had been unaware of a serious loophole in their two decade-long blockade on the movement, responded firmly: no camping for the members of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*. Then they went on to take some precautionary measures to show, or so it seemed, that they would get their orders implemented and not tolerate any defiance: one camp in the region of Nador city was simply set to fire; another was ransacked and all the camping equipment was confiscated whereas the organizers of other camps would never have even the chance of setting foot on the sites they had used in the previous summers.²⁹

Al-Adl wal-Ihsan denounced vehemently these measures which contravened the laws and violated the most elementary rights of human beings. It did not want, and

has never sought, to engage in an open struggle with the security forces, but it thought of an idea which proved embarrassing to the new ruling team, Mohamed VI and his ilk, and a real litmus test of the slogans raised with the so called “new era” such as “the new concept of power”, “the rule of law”, “democracy”, “respect for internationally recognized human rights”, and so forth. The idea was quite simple: instead of organizing separate camps, why not go to the beaches where everybody went and mingle with the general public?

The consequences of this simple idea were beyond all expectations. As if caught by surprise, the Moroccan authorities resorted to force, the option they favoured most and could readily think of, and that is how “the war of the beaches”, as it was referred to in the media, started. There is no need to go into detail, but it is not hard to imagine what the general atmosphere was like in the summer of 2000. The government with its resources and different apparatuses all mobilised to fight for “a sacred cause”: preventing, at all costs, men, women, boys, girls and children, too, - whose parents belonged to *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*- from going to the beach! As for the Interior Minister, he, all of a sudden, turned “Grand Mufti” and issued his notorious *fatwa* (an edict) that forbade prayers on the beaches because they incited sectarianism among Moroccan people who are all Muslims! Wittingly or unwittingly Honourable Minister made himself the laughing stock of the Islamic world with his idiotic “*fatwa*”!³⁰

This may sound strange or even unbelievable or too much exaggerated, but absurdities of the kind are not rare in the kingdom of Morocco. In the 1980s, for example, Moroccan people still remember too well when a kind of witch-hunt was launched against “beards” and “scarves”. Many bearded gentlemen were taken to the police stations and /or to the *Mukata’a* to provide an answer to a sole question: “Why do you grow a beard?” And however sensible and convincing your response might be , they would not let you go until either you shaved it yourself (a blunt razor, possibly used by other victims, would be provided for free) or a policeman or “*Marda*”³¹ would take care of you. No victim would ever recommend the latter option!

As for girls who started to wear *hijab* at the time, they were not allowed in school unless they removed their headscarves. One headmaster used to chase defiant girls in the schoolyard and rid them of their scarves, and from this practice he was thought to have collected lots of them, enough to start a small business! It would take volumes to tell stories of the kind. But these examples should be sufficient to give an idea about the system of rule in place, its priorities and its concerns on the eve of the 21st century.

In addition to summer camping, the Moroccan universities, long seen as a stronghold of the youth of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, were the next important target envisioned in the “new era” policy. Student Unions, dominated by students affiliated or close to the *al-Adl* movement, benefited a great deal from a certain degree of freedom allowed within the universities to increase their follower base and enhance their influence. After the publication of the *Memorandum*, this was not to be tolerated any more. Thus, on 1st September 2000, a wide campaign of arrests was launched against the activities organized by Student Unions in different universities. The campaign started with Abi Chuaib ad-Doukkali University in Eljadida (about 125 miles south of the capital Rabat). Many students were arrested, or expelled from university or brought to trial after being tortured in police stations. Once again the Moroccan authorities proved their unquestionable ability to create new, unnecessary problems, as if Morocco had not already had enough and in a field where the conditions fostering wrath and indignation abound: overcrowded classrooms, content loaded curricula, lack of resources... and above all the gloomy prospects awaiting the graduates.

A third target in the new ruling team’s agenda was to prohibit the movement from publishing, distributing or displaying publicly any printed materials, whether books, newspapers or leaflets or anything of the sort. Thus, Yassine’s books were not permitted to be displayed in the Casablanca International Book Fair held in November 2000. Thousands of copies of *Al-Futuwa* and *Al-Adl wal-Ihsan* newspapers were confiscated before they were placed under a total ban without any official explanation or legal excuse. Two independent magazines which dared to re-publish the *Memorandum* were also confiscated to send a clear warning to

those who ventured dealing with *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, let alone supporting it. One printing house company which published Yassine's recent book entitled *Justice: Islamists and Power* was attacked, in a rather burglar-like manner, at night and all its equipment was either demolished or taken away, and so were 800 copies of the *Justice* book. What "burglars" who, according to eyewitnesses, were accompanied by several cars, would do with these books is still not known. One thing for sure is that those who engineered this "burglary" of an independent printing company most probably believed that despite the change of time and circumstances and the emergence of new communication technologies, it was still possible to impede opposition voices from being heard and different ideas from spreading. Nothing would make people even more eager to know about those "ideas" than to try to suppress them. This is exactly what happened. The number of copies of *Justice* – and other books as well– which were in one way or another printed and distributed from hand to hand far exceeded the number originally planned.³²

A Fourth target concerns street demonstrations. After the publication of *The Memorandum* all forms of protest, though peaceful and whether they concern national or international issues, were not authorized if the initiative came from *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*; and in case they were organized, they would be crushed harshly. The first opportunity for this decision to be put into effect occurred on 10th December 2000, when the movement staged peaceful sit-ins in eight Moroccan cities to celebrate International Human Rights Day and protest the continuous human rights violation in Morocco. The atrocities inflicted upon protestors on that day were well documented and some of the bloody scenes were shown on world TV channels and drew the attention of many print media journalists and human rights reporters.

Compared to the above-mentioned measures, two, however, seemed to be the most serious blunders in the new *Makhzenian* strategy. The first occurred when many members of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* were prevented from going to *al-Haj* (to pilgrimage in Mecca), including Yassine's wife, son, son-in-law and members of the Guidance Council. This decision, besides being arbitrary, was considered by many observers a gross error the government of late Hassan II, to be fair, would not

commit. It is clear evidence that the new ruling team were rather disconnected from their people and did not weigh the consequences of such rash decisions in a Muslim society.³³

The other serious blunder was to target *an-Nassiha* meetings which were organized once or twice a month and devoted to special acts of worship such as reciting the Quran, night prayers, religious talks and so forth. Under the new orders, the security services would rush to the places where those meetings were being held and take everybody to the police stations. After hours of questioning, they would usually set them free late at night or the next morning. In some cases, a selected group would be tried for holding illegal meetings. This operation repeated again and again drew the attention of various media outlets, which led many people to inquire about these meetings and try to find out about their nature and aims. I need not stress the bewilderment of those who, out of curiosity, made the search. "What's the harm of such gatherings?" they wondered. "Did a group of peaceful people meeting to pray represent a threat to the country?" Why don't the police track down criminals whose number has grown alarmingly so much so that many citizens, especially women, are attacked in broad daylight?" To be fair, many policemen, too, admitted that they knew that what they were doing was just absurd, and in an apologetic voice they would add that they were just implementing the orders they received. As for the members of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, nothing would deter them from holding those meetings, knowing that the Moroccan regime was paying dearly of its reputation for targeting them. Many people learnt and ultimately joined the movement because of those incidents. And for those who wonder how *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* has expanded so quickly, here is probably one of the clues.

In summary, if the rule of Mohammad VI differs in any way from his father's, it is not in essence but only in "style" as he himself pointed out in an interview given to the French magazine *Paris-Match*.³⁴ The way in which the country is governed and political opposition is treated is much the same as before. Yet, *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* has managed to resist repression, maintain its coherence and increase its base. In certain cases, it even succeeded to put the Moroccan regime in an embarrassing situation in the eyes of the general public inside and outside the country.

Furthermore, as it will be shown in the next section, the politics of oppression towards *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* has not deterred it from improving its internal structure continuously to adapt to the changing circumstances. As for the monarch, he seems determined to carry on not just “like father, like son,” but rather to show that “son can outsmart father.” Some time may be needed before we can know for sure about the outcome of such a policy in a country like Morocco already facing many challenges.

3.4 Organizational structure of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* [Justice and Spirituality]

The organizational structure of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* [Justice and Spirituality] is not well-understood and in some studies it is poorly presented if not deliberately distorted. It is true that there are some observers who consider *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* the best organized Islamic group in Morocco, but others have a different view: they regard it as nothing more than a slight variation of a Sufi order or, at best an improved form of confrerie with Sheikh Yassine at the centre, involved in all issues and making all the decisions whereas the followers merely execute the orders of their master!³⁵ This section challenges these claims and seeks first to find out about the reasons behind these misconceptions and then to show, by a brief examination of the movement’s internal structure, whether a single person, as it is claimed, could possibly manage a large organization like *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*.

There may be different reasons for what is considered in the view of the movement unwarranted misconceptions and unreliable accounts. Some base their perception on unfounded information concerning the emergence of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*. They claim that when Abdessalam Yassine disagreed with his master al-Alhaj al-Abas about the question of succession, Yassine left *Zawiya al-Butchichiya* to set up his own Sufi order. Consequently, the structure of his group could not differ from the traditional format adopted by Sufi orders in general, without excluding some minor changes to adapt to the new circumstances.³⁶

Others base their analyses on *Al-Minhaj An-Nabawi* [the Prophetic Method], a book which is actually of great importance to *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*. They focus particularly on

Chapter IV because it provides an outline of the Islamic movement to be set up. They never try, or so it seems, to find out whether a chart outlined in a book compiled more than three decades ago is still relevant or whether it has been partly or wholly revised.³⁷

If some researchers, however, have focused on *Al-Minhaj An-Nabawi* [the Prophetic Method], assuming that the movement could not reconsider what is proposed by its leader, or simply because they do not know of a reliable source to be better informed how *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* is organized, others unfortunately seem less interested in reflecting facts as they are. In a recent study by Mohsine Ahmadi published in 2006, we are presented with a structure that has nothing to do with *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* as we know it today.³⁸ What is more is that he uses it to draw a number of conclusions. Commenting on what he describes as a section for martial arts, he deduces that the “*Ihsanistes*”, as he calls them [i.e members of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*], have preference for violent sports because of their confirmed inclination towards organized violence!³⁹ This is just one small example among many others.

According to reliable sources the aforementioned section does not and has never existed. And if Mr Ahmadi, the author of the said study, carried out a survey to find out about the type of sport the “*Ihsanistes*”, to use his term, practise or prefer, he most probably would be surprised to discover that the majority prefer, like many Moroccans, football, whether they practice it or not. And if he could infer from this anything, however gross it might be, it does not matter much as long as facts are right.

3.4.1 How did *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* start and develop structurally?

Before we proceed to answer such a question, a bit of history about an important factor that preceded the emergence of the movement should prove helpful here. Unlike other Islamic groups, in Morocco at least, *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* differs from them in that when it was set up in September 1981, a theoretical framework for undertaking organized Islamic action had already been in place. Yassine, convinced that knowledge precedes action, as the old Islamic saying goes, had

invested a lot of effort for many years to work out what he terms *Al-Minhaj An-Nabawi* [The Prophetic Method] which he first published in *Al-Jamaa Journal* and soon after in a book form. In his view, unless there is a clear vision from the beginning as where to start, which way to go, and how to get to the intended destination, the chances of getting confused and failing to make any significant progress are quite high.⁴⁰

The intention here is not to discuss the content of *Al-Minhaj An-Nabawi* but rather to point out to a widespread misconception. It is true that *the Prophetic Method* is for *al-Adl* its basic theoretical blueprint, but that does not mean it is above criticism or that members should literally stick to whatever it proposes. As a matter of fact, a number of ideas have been revised and some suggestions have been completely reconsidered. A conspicuous example is Chapter IV in *Al-Minhaj An-Nabawi* and particularly the sections dealing with the structure of the movement which have been thoroughly revised. The reason is that when this chapter was first composed in the late 70s, it was not meant to be “a sacred formula” that should be adhered to by all means and under all circumstances, but rather a proposal to start an Islamic organization that had not yet seen the light of day. Indeed there are a number of examples that highlight the difference between what does actually exist now and what was originally devised, and the political section is one example among many others. The leaders of *al-Adl* themselves have confirmed this fact in many speeches and interviews.⁴¹ Hence, it comes as no surprise the gross error incurred by those who, by chance or design, have chosen to base their analyses on purely irrelevant data!

Now let us get down to facts but, with a word of caution, I should add that it is beyond the scope of this study to trace all the structural changes *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* has experienced since its inception until today or go into much detail the disclosure of which may not be approved by the movement leadership. Therefore, I would focus on just four major phases and try to present the general configuration, so to speak, of the movement in each period.⁴² I do not claim that the way I have proceeded to divide these phases is ideal, but according to the documents I have consulted and the data I have collected, I think that what I suggest here seems

very plausible. Some researchers may want to do it differently, whereas others may object to the idea itself on the grounds that the division of what may be intertwined and overlapping phases can only be arbitrary and may not reflect the reality. This is not the place to discuss such an issue, but, as far as I am concerned, I am of the view that, as a heuristic device, the practice could significantly help us to understand the subject under study.

Phase One: From 1981 to 1986

During this period the structure of the movement was very simple for obvious reasons. The major concern then was to be and to meet basically the educational needs of the members, taking into account the scant resources available at the time and the very limited number of adherents. There were no local, regional or national committees or offices except for the leading council of the association which was then composed of eight members including Sheikh Yassine. Four broad geographic areas were sketched out and each of which was assigned to a member of the leading council.

This period actually lasted four years and four months during which the Moroccan regime took harsh measures against the nascent movement, hoping to nip it in the bud, as explained before. Many members were arrested and imprisoned, including Sheikh Yassine who was jailed for two years. It is not surprising then that the structural development of the movement was slowed down. Given the prevailing circumstances, the main challenge was how to cope with the regime's repressive measures and continue to grow, albeit slowly, in size and influence.

Phase Two: 1986 – 1991

When Sheikh Abdessalam Yassine was set free in December 1985 and so were other members of the movement, an important step was taken two months later which proved very beneficial to *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, especially with regard to its integrating skills as well as its performance. An Executive Council was set up on 20th February 1986, composed at the beginning of four committees: one for organization, the second for communications, the third for students and the fourth

for artistic activities (songs, sports, drama and the like). The heads of these committees formed another one which functioned as the coordinating committee. The following figure [Fig. 3. 1] shows what the overall structure of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, including the Executive Council, looked like at that time:

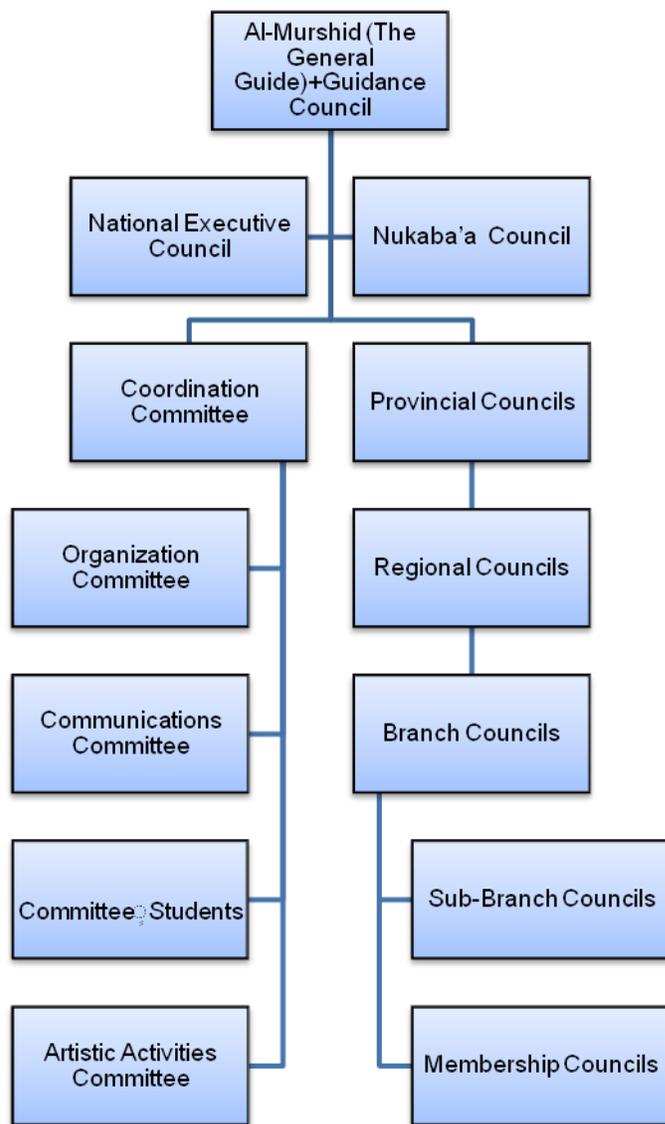


Fig. 3. 1 Organizational Structure of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* until 1991 (Source: The Movement's internal documents).

Phase Three: 1991 – 1998

The Executive Council had been expanding continuously in line with the movement's strategy to try to provide an opportunity for all its members to get

involved, improve their contribution and develop their leadership skills. Meanwhile, those committees were assessed regularly so that if any of them no longer served any objectives of the movement or appeared to be inefficient, then it would be examined for elimination or renewal and reconstruction. Thus certain committees were added to the existing ones, others were removed or revamped with new elements. Towards the end of 1998 the number of committees had reached nine: one for education, the second for children, the third for Islamic sciences, the fourth for *Da'wah* [for raising Islamic awareness among the public and increasing membership], the fifth committee for social work services, the sixth for school pupils, the seventh for communications, the eighth for students, and the ninth is arts and sports committee [Fig.3. 2].

All of these committees have as part of their structure provincial committees linked to them, but others went further to have regional or even local committees affiliated to them as the following figure shows:

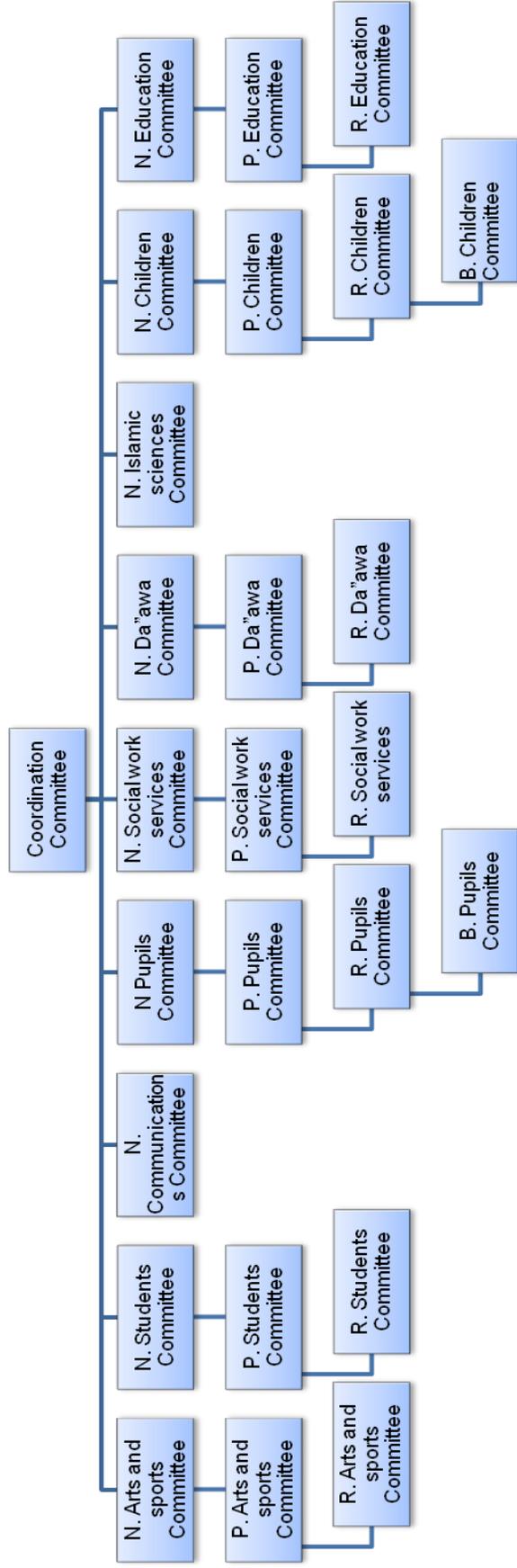


Fig. 3. 2 Executive Council until 1998 (Same source as above).

NB : **N= National**; **P= Provincial**; **R= Regional**; **B= Branch**
 : **1st row: National Committees**; **2nd row: Provincial Committees**; **3rd row: Regional Committees**;
4th row: Branch Committees

In 1991, another organizational measure was taken, considering the country as four large provinces: northern, southern, eastern and the midland province. In 1993 a minor modification was introduced and as a result the number of provinces, as they are termed in the bylaws of the movement, became five. In the summer of 1996 the number rose to nine.

During the same period a Consultative Assembly was set up, but due to the prevailing circumstances, it only debated matters of special importance. Between 1996 and 1998, a committee was set up to lay out a blueprint for the movement's political section. Another initiative was also taken to give women members the opportunity to improve and secure their organizational independence vis-à-vis the men section of the movement. We will see in the next phase how these initiatives have been translated into practice.

Phase Four: 1998 – 2011

In 1998 the political section of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* was officially set up, but it took some time before it took its overall shape. Meanwhile, the Executive Council was dissolved, and some of its committees were kept and incorporated into the political section or into the movement's body of committees and specialized groups. In this period the women's section also became structurally more independent. After the establishment of the political section other task groups and units [Fig. 3. 3] also saw the light of day such as the Lawyers League, Human Rights Committee, Council of Scholars, Leadership Training Committee, the Writers League, Support Committee (for Arab and Muslim peoples).

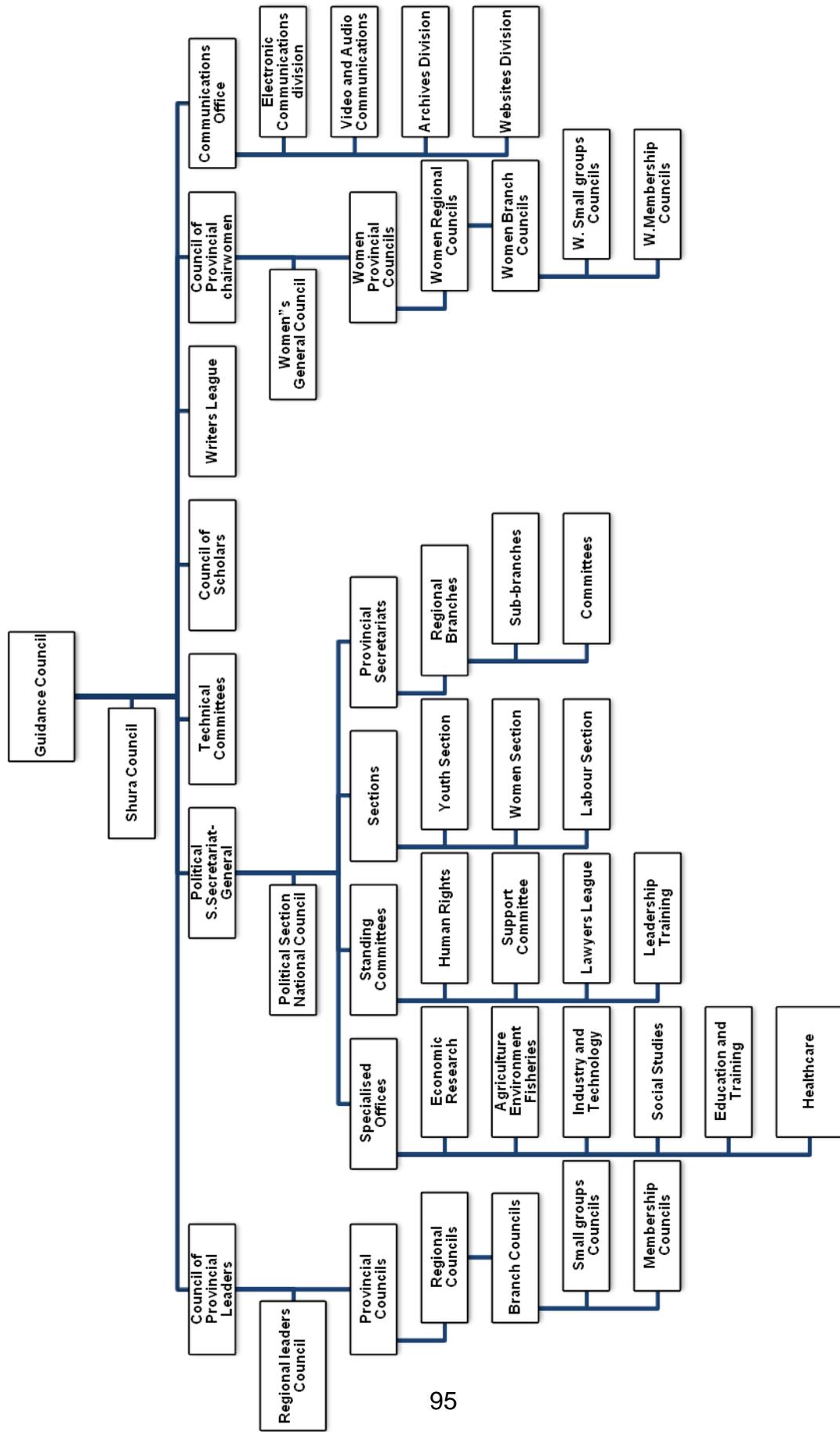


Fig. 3. 3 Structure of al-Adl wal-Ihsan until 2011(Same source as above).

There is no doubt that these developments demonstrate a genuine interest in continuous improvement and provide clear evidence of the positive dynamics a young Islamic movement displays. However, not all changes were at all times beneficial. One of the drawbacks of the movement's structure as it evolved towards the last decade, for example, is that the committees and sub-committees, sections and sub-sections and other specialized groups had increased to such an extent that it might not be easy for anyone, let alone the outsider, to grasp the relationships between the different bodies within the movement and how they operated coherently. Hence, a high-level planning committee was set up to consider this issue and in 2012 it proposed what is claimed to be a more integrated format as the following figure hopefully shows:

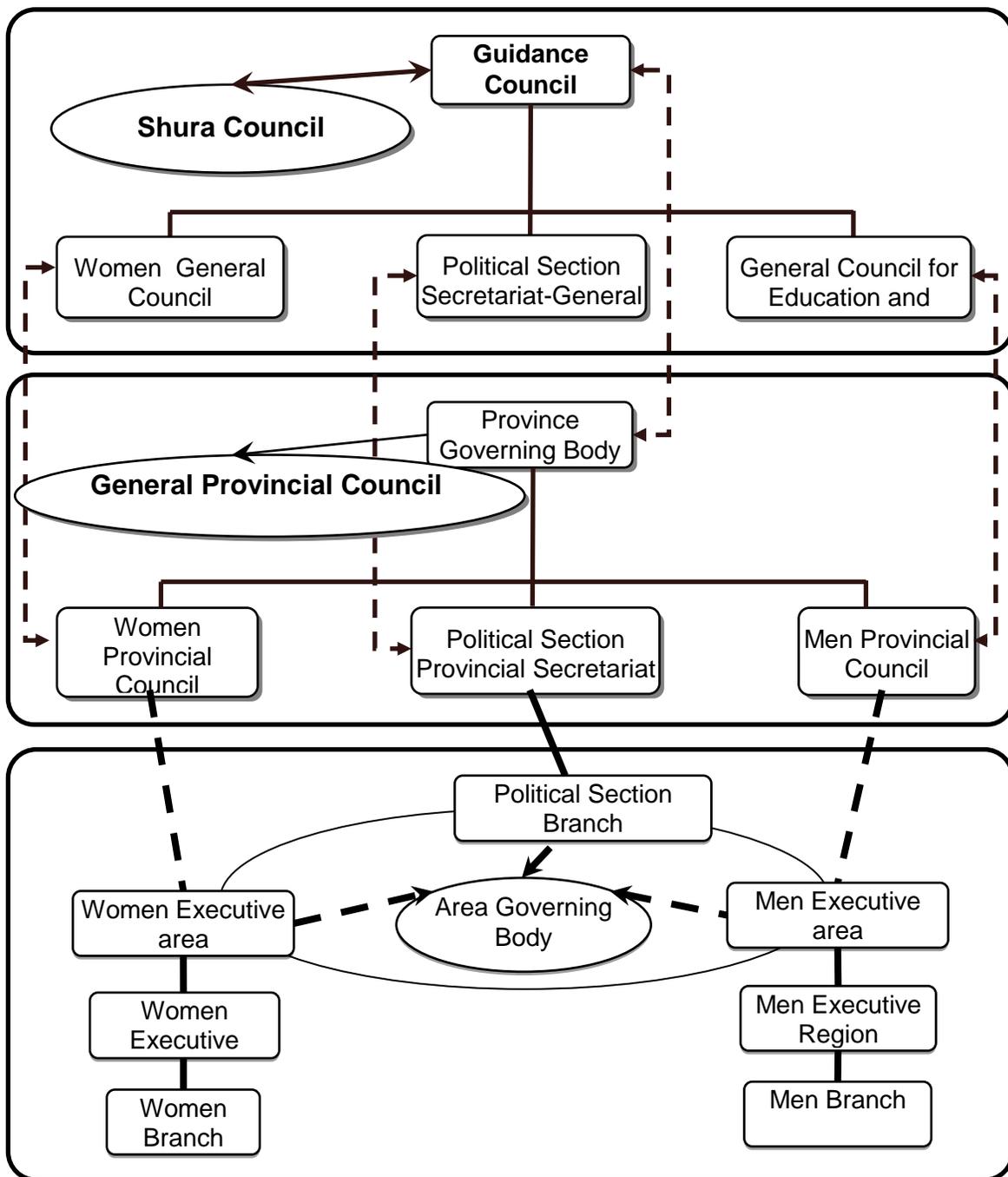


Fig. 3. 4 A simplified chart of the structure of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* since 2012 (Same Source).

3.4.2 Remarks

Such were in brief the different stages the movement has gone through to this date. However, for the sake of further clarification, a few remarks need to be made here. One of these is that the organizational structure of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, as we have seen, was very simple at the beginning but developed over the years according to the movement's needs and priorities, taking into consideration the changing circumstances which have invariably been far from friendly or encouraging.

A second remark is that, given the prevailing oppressive policies of the Moroccan regime towards the opposition groups in general and *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* in particular, the structure of the movement could adequately be qualified as "militant". If it had developed in a free, truly democratic environment, the picture would most probably have been different. Knowing that it is being targeted, the movement has been compelled to be constantly alert, expecting at any moment to be attacked. This might have served it to keep its members motivated, but in the meantime it has caused a certain degree of instability. For over three decades, it has never been allowed the required conditions to function normally. It has no official headquarters, no permanent central, provincial or regional premises with the necessary equipment and where it could hold its regular meetings or other activities, and it has been denied the right to use public facilities. No wonder that some activities may be postponed or even cancelled either for security reasons or because no convenient venue could be found. In a word, the movement's structure reflects to some extent the prevailing stifling political mood in the country.

A third remark is that the structure of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* has never been regarded as ideal and the senior members of the movement are aware of its weaknesses but they cannot help it. Some problems seem to persist despite the efforts made to overcome them. One of the reasons is that in some cases the movement finds itself compelled to undertake, not what appears best or preferable, but rather what is possible.⁴³

A fourth one which is worthy of notice is that regardless of whatever shortcomings may be identified in the movement's structure, it has nonetheless developed to be virtually a huge network capable not only of maintaining the coherence of an ever-expanding organization, but also of "spotting strange elements" early enough, before they could climb the hierarchical ladder and occupy any key post in the decision-making bodies of the movement. Stories of unwelcome activists trying to infiltrate the group are not rare, and the latest one is the case of a lawyer alleged to have been found red-handed and expelled from the movement after acknowledging he had been working for the Moroccan secret services. The police, angered at their failure to achieve a long cherished dream, retorted by kidnapping seven senior members of the movement in Fez on 28th June 2010 and took them to a secret detention where they were brutally tortured before they were sent to court. The scandal was widely reported by national and international media, resulting in the strong condemnation of world human rights organizations of the atrocities committed by the Moroccan authorities and the support of many European lawyers who attended the seven members' trial in the city of Fez.⁴⁴

The final remark is that, given that *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* is the largest Islamic movement in Morocco, as it is commonly known, with its broad and expanding organization network, it follows that it may be hard to believe that it could be managed or controlled by a single person, however talented he might be. When Tozy, Bahaji and others claim, for example, that Yassine "nominates the heads of the cells," they do not tell us in any convincing way how it could be done in practice.⁴⁵ How could Yassine appoint thousands of persons even if he wanted?! Furthermore, it is a small issue in which not even a provincial leader is expected to interfere. Errors of the sort about *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* are unfortunately widespread. If a certain degree of scepticism is understandable and comment is free, to distort facts is no good, is it?

3.5 Conclusion

To conclude, it could be said without fear of exaggerating that *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* was born and developed in a political environment which, to say the least, was far from friendly or democratic in any significant way. Since its inception in September

1981, it has invariably been subject to a policy of harassment and repression. There were moments when it eased but only to allow some time, or so it seemed, for the preparation of a new bundle of coercive measures or to let off, for a while, the steam to prevent “the Moroccan pot” from exploding. *Al-Adl wal-Ihsan* members have suffered periods of detention in police stations and custody ranging from a few hours to 20 years of imprisonment and fines amounting, if added together, to thousands and thousands of US dollars. Many have been kicked out of their jobs whereas others have been obstructed at every turn to conduct their own businesses properly until they have gone bankrupt. Some houses have been sealed off on the pretext of being meeting places for the movement members.

During the arrest campaigns nobody has been spared, not even children and babies with their mothers, and the accusation has always been the same: holding illegal meetings and/or belonging to an illegal organization. Summer camps and picnic events are not allowed and even some marriage and death ceremonies and the like social gatherings are impeded. Some members have been denied the right of having a passport for over 20 years. More than 300 associations which are suspected to be close to *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* have been suspended.

Despite this long period of continuous repressive measures of which only some examples have been cited, *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* has remained all the way through determined to cling to its non-violent approach. To some observers the movement has so far conducted the struggle well and intelligently. It has exploited every opportunity to make its voice heard, and has exhibited a lot of creativity to foil the *Makhzen's* strategies or turn them to its advantage. In certain cases it has made the regime look really ludicrous at the national as well as at the international level. Other commentators have gone further to point out that the movement had done a great service to a “thankless regime”, for it had been a bulwark against the spread of extremism in Morocco. One journalist speaking on Aljazeera Channel once claimed that *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* had displayed too much moderation to the extent it had become like “a large fridge” for many young Moroccans.⁴⁶

Whatever the weaknesses of the movement and the mistakes it could have made, three aspects of its political and organizational strength cannot be denied. The first is that it has never faltered or hesitated to describe, in stunning clarity and frankness, the Moroccan regime as it is. Indeed, it has set the bar up so high that no other political activist living in Morocco, secular or Islamist, from the right or the left, has ever tried to clear. The most audacious demand ever made is to ask for a parliamentary monarchy.

The second one is that *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* started in 1981 in Morocco and right from the beginning it clearly articulated its demands for a new political system, assuming its full responsibility. It does not have a single political asylum seeker outside the country. It has suffered for being outspoken in its opposition to what it considers a despotic regime, knowing that the road to freedom, dignity, justice and true democracy is rarely, if ever strewn with roses.

The third is that notwithstanding what *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* has had to go through for nearly three decades, it has managed not only to maintain its coherence and adapt to the changing circumstances but also to constantly renew and improve its organizational mechanisms to the extent of being recognised the best organised social and political movement in Morocco. As we have tried to show in the section on the internal structure of the movement, it has never stuck to the same organizational format for long. It always seeks to improve its tools and means to avoid any possible organizational inertia on the one hand, and on the other to be in a better position to cope with its needs and overcome the various challenges it faces. If it cannot be claimed that all its initiatives have been successful, it cannot be claimed either that what has been achieved is insignificant.

That said, can we conclude that the politics of repression pursued by the Moroccan authorities has fallen far short of its intended goals? Answers may differ, but in the view of this author although the Moroccan regime has created many difficulties for *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*; it has failed to eradicate it, or to split it into smaller groups or to stop it from expanding. Indeed, the movement's influence has even crossed the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, to Europe, USA and Canada. However, if *al-Adl*

wal-Ihsan does constitute a challenge to the regime, it still has not managed to harness enough support to topple it or pave the way for the emergence of a new political order in Morocco. This means that the struggle is likely to continue for some time. For how long and in whose favour will the balance be tilted ultimately? Perhaps the next ten or fifteen years will give us a clue.

In this study, however, our concern is not to make speculations as to who will ultimately prevail, but rather to better understand a Moroccan Islamic experience which, despite enjoying a steady rise to prominence, seems to be poorly understood and often misrepresented. In the next chapter we will explore another aspect relating this time to its intellectual foundation but, given the limited space, we will only focus on selected key concepts, hoping they will provide us with much insight into the nature and vision of a contemporary, Moroccan Islamist movement that has not yet had the opportunity to tell its full story.

Chapter 4 Key Concepts in the Thought of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*

To achieve a good understanding of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* and thereby base our analysis on facts, whatever the interpretations we may adopt, we need, among other things to be acquainted with the key concepts which we frequently come across in the writings of the movement in general and those of its leader and founder in particular. Terms like *ihsan*, *ijtihad*, *fitna*, *kawma* and many others employed in the discourse of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* are not its own invention, nor are they borrowed from foreign cultures. They are rather well-rooted in the Islamic culture, namely the Quran and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet of Islam, and the general Muslim public is quite familiar with them, though the level of understanding of the details and the points of agreement and disagreement involved may vary from one person to another.

The choice of these concepts which is made exclusively from within the Islamic heritage seems to serve at least two basic purposes. One of them is to secure effective communication and clarity of message. Yassine is of the view that terms are seldom, if ever, neutral; and to avoid any possible confusion, he prefers to use the language and the words that Muslims understand better and with which they feel more at home, though there is nothing wrong in borrowing from other cultures if need be. The second important purpose is to indicate that the position of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* vis-à-vis a number of issues is not dictated by personal vested interests or any political expediency, but rather defined by principles drawn from the major sources of Islam.

Though some Muslim thinkers may not agree with some interpretations adopted by the movement, they cannot question or doubt the sources on which they are based or claim that they are not justified by Islamic standards. Sheikh Yassine has seen to it that his stances are supported by authentic Islamic texts, by the views and practices of eminent scholars where necessary and also, and this is very important, by reason and human experiences, both past and present. Such being the case,

we could venture to say that a line of thinking within mainstream contemporary Islamic trend but distinctive in some respects has actually seen the light of day with the emergence of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*.

To shed light on aspects of the claimed line of thinking advocated by the movement, this chapter will discuss three selected concepts –*ijtihad, fitna, ihsan*– which have triggered no small amount of controversy. Sheikh Yassine has employed them not only to deal with modern concerns but also to call into question some conventional ideas which had dominated the Islamic thought for years and even for centuries. Each of the following three sections of this chapter will focus on a single concept and examine its meaning, rationale and its implications. Thus it will hopefully become clear why *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* displays features which, prima facie, seem to be incongruent, perplexing or even contradictory such as the position towards society, government and Sufism, to cite but a few examples, but if examined closely they would be found consistent and faithful to an original Islamic view and spirit which *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* has only pioneered or sought to revive.

4.1 *Ijtihad*

The current body of literature on the issue of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) as a tool to tackle new issues from an acceptable Islamic point of view is certainly large, yet it is still growing. A lot has been written about its meaning, importance, scope, its fields and the required conditions for its practice.¹ Many recent studies point out that *ijtihad*, despite its agreed, crucial importance, unfortunately lost its initial momentum for a long time as a result of the decline of the Islamic civilization, giving way to what is called in Islamic jurisprudence *taqlid* (blind imitation of early jurists). The consequences of such a deficiency have been detrimental to the Islamic *Umma* and account, in part at least, for much of the hardships it has experienced during its long history.

Lexically, *ijtihad* means “the exertion of effort on a matter that requires it.”² In the field of Islamic law and jurisprudence, it is defined as the total expenditure of effort made by those qualified “in order to understand the source and deduce the rules

or, in the absence of a clear textual guidance, formulate independent judgements...”³ Concerning its importance, it is now a truism that unless *ijtihad* is given due consideration and recovers its former pride of place in Islamic thought and jurisprudence, the Arab and Islamic world will continue to lag behind other advanced nations and all the talks about freedom, justice, development and progress will be no more than a sad exercise in daydreaming and wishful thinking.

Granted, but what input has *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* brought to the discussion of an issue which despite being debated for several decades has lost nothing of its intellectual interest and academic relevance? There is not much space here to go into detail, but we will try to focus on a few selected aspects which have been either missing in the literature on the subject, or not stressed enough to underline their importance or because they are considered from a perspective different from the ones known in the field.

There are a number of principles upon which Muslim scholars and thinkers do not seem to disagree, but their views may differ widely on when and how to put them to practice. *Ijtihad* is undoubtedly one of these. If it is generally agreed that it is of vital importance to the development and progress of the Islamic thought and *Umma*, there are a number of things that should be borne in mind in order for this tool to be employed effectively. Otherwise, it would merely maintain the status quo and increase disagreement and tension among Muslims.

Sheikh Yassine has dealt with this issue in many of his books and speeches and has pointed out to two major impediments that should be overcome to secure the conditions for *ijtihad* to be undertaken and be fruitful. The first has to do with what he calls “the shackles of blind imitation” whose impact is still present even in the writings and discourse of some advocates of *ijtihad*.⁴ A conspicuous example concerns the authoritarian regimes which have been in power throughout most of Islamic history. Despite clear texts which dub them as coercive, despotic forms of government, some scholars still defend them and regard them as legitimate, though they may speak about the need for reform.⁵ The reason is that the views of some jurists and scholars still depend on rulings which, besides being debatable

any way, were made centuries ago and in circumstances different from the present ones.

It is worth noting, however, that those rulings justifying authoritarianism do indeed exist and they are not rare in the Islamic heritage; hence the spell they have acquired with the passage of time to the point of being mistakenly confused with revealed texts is amazing. Here lies one of the major weaknesses of the Islamic jurisprudence despite its enormous wealth and impressive achievements in other areas. However, the fact that not much was produced in the political sphere is not due to any intellectual inability, but rather to pure political reasons. This started thirty years after the death of Prophet Muhammad when the *Khilafa ar-Rachida* (rightly-guided Caliphate) was overthrown and replaced by autocratic, hereditary rule. The *fukaha* (Muslim scholars) were gradually marginalized and, indeed, forcefully deterred from tackling political issues. Those who refused to comply were persecuted, jailed, tortured or even assassinated. This accounts largely for the gaps in what is called the jurisprudence of transactions and particularly in political theory. Yassine stresses the need to overcome what may be described as epistemological and psychological obstacles and to reconsider many received ideas and attitudes that are not founded on reliable sources; and even if some stances were ever justified at their times and in their circumstances, that is no excuse to regard them as binding on Muslims at all times and in all places.⁶

The second impediment is “to think under duress”, or, to put it simply, to practice *ijtihad* under pressure, physical, psychological or whatever. The fact of the matter is that the current circumstances at the national as well as the international level are not encouraging, to say the least. Authoritarianism continues to reign supreme in most, if not all Arab and Islamic countries and unfortunately with the complacency and even the overt protection of some Western powers. This accounts largely for the emergence of a kind of defeatism leading to political apathy, frustration, despair and the like phenomena which are widespread in Muslim societies, and even among some educated people.

Now if the committee or institution charged with the task of making *ijtihad* is negatively impacted by the prevailing mood, its project is likely to stop short of providing what is needed to restore to the *Umma* its dignity including its right of being ruled by a government of its own choice. Instead, it may be apologetic or submissive on the grounds that one should be realistic and take into account the prevalent harsh realities or the like excuses which, if examined closely, are far from convincing. For this reason, Yassine maintains that those who tackle the issues of *ijtihad* should be independent-minded, responsible scholars and thinkers and not be subject to any constraints whatsoever.⁷

This does not mean that Sheikh Yassine rules out realism or taking into consideration the existing conditions. On the contrary, he stresses in a number of books the need to be well-informed about the conditions of society before proposing any solutions to its problems. He even cites some ideas concerning certain sectors such as the banking system which, according to him, if put to practice immediately, would cause disaster.⁸ The point he intends to make, however, is that some excuses when pushed too far, as it has often been the case, are likely to serve the will and interests of the forces seeking to maintain the status quo.

4.1.1 Types of *ijtihad* :

Different perspectives have been used to discuss *ijtihad* and its types.⁹ As for Sheikh Yassine, he considers the issue from a perspective according to which two types of *ijtihad* should be of prime importance. The first type should be carried out before the establishment of an Islamic state and is basically concerned with what could be described as the strategic issues (*al-kuliyat*).¹⁰ It seeks to investigate and devise a theoretical and practical framework to reform society and government from an Islamic point of view. How to educate people, how to organize them and raise their awareness so that they assume their responsibilities and get actively involved in working for the required reform should be the major concerns of this type of *ijtihad*.

According to Yassine, this type of *ijtihad* is faced with two major challenges. One is intellectual and has to do with a widespread perception in many social milieus, whose understanding of Islam is far from being satisfactory.¹¹ The question then is how to secure an adequate understanding of Islam as a way of life, concerned not only with prayers, fasting, *zakah* (alms) and *hajj* (pilgrimage) but also with justice, development and prosperity. How to free common people from superstitions and old received misconceptions and teach them that Islam is a revolt against injustice, corruption, humiliation, exploitation and impoverishment of people? How to convince them that the achievement of their freedom and dignity is dependent upon their involvement instead of engaging in wishful thinking and idly waiting for it to be served on a silver platter?

The other challenge that arises once the question of comprehension and conviction is settled is that of organization. Given that individual attempts and disorganized initiatives will not lead far especially if we bear in mind the nature and scope of the reform that is sought for, the question then is how to organise Islamic action in such an effective way that it could materialize the aspired goals? “How to make,” wonders Yassine, “of the existing good disposition among common Muslims a powerful tool to rid of the wrong and set up the right?”¹² Here, says Yassine, lies the great difficulty.¹³ A lot of creativity and imagination is needed in order to devise a viable plan of action combining what he considers three fundamental pillars: “the sacred revealed texts, the wisdom of reason and the faith of the heart.” The required *ijtihad*, as he argues, is “to combine these three pillars... to create an action plan that is achievable.”¹⁴

The second type of *ijtihad* is to be tackled after the establishment of an Islamic political order. It is concerned with adapting the social, economical and especially the political system to Islamic principles and criteria.¹⁵ In other words if the former type deals with the strategic objectives that would create a conducive environment for the establishment of a viable and agreed Islamic system of government, the latter should complement the first, coping with the details, filling up the gaps, sorting out the different components and the like tasks to achieve coherence. It is no easy matter given the ruin incurred by a long history of despotism.

4.1.2 Conditions and approach

Not everybody is qualified to conduct *ijtihad*, and the classical approach to cope with increasingly complex issues of modern times would not be of much help either. Therefore, there are a number of conditions that should be met, and some of these are highlighted in the following paragraph:

Intertwined and contradictory interests in a complex world undergoing many crises of which we will not make head or tail if we do not liberate ourselves from the shackles of *taqlid* (blind imitation) and base [our independent reasoning] on the higher sources of *ijtihad*: the Quran and the Sunnah (sayings, actions and approvals of the Prophet), *quiyas* (analogical reasoning) performed by intelligent pious specialists, and the *ijma'a* (the consensus) of scholars who have liberated themselves from the yoke of despotic rule.¹⁶

In this passage Sheikh Yassine articulates some of the conditions which he thinks should be fulfilled by those conducting *ijtihad*. The first is to avoid imitating blindly earlier scholars without considerations of the changing circumstances of society and the increasing complexity of the modern world; the second is the importance of moral and spiritual uprightness, and this quality has rarely, if ever, received the attention it deserves in the writings of contemporary Muslim thinkers ; the third is that *ijtihad* should not be undertaken under constraints of any kind; the fourth is the importance of balanced knowledge of the required sciences, including but not limited to *Sharia*; the fifth is the importance and the presence of what might be described as “the intellectual engagé”. To explain further this condition, he says:

No single person is qualified enough for the *ijtihad* tasks. Nor does the duty of scholars of *ijtihad* stop at merely deducing rulings and giving them their legal status. The scholars of *ijtihad* must belong to the movement advocating the message (of Islam), and come up from within it. They must live it, breathe its spirit, shoulder its burden and strongly object to the flaws, present or expected, that can creep into it. If scholars of *ijtihad* are merely people who look into books, write documents, consider texts, put questions in abstract and toe the line, and if they are just eloquent mouths expressing thoughts but their hearts are not fully in them, they will be a disaster. Indeed, they will contribute to the demise of religion.¹⁷

Such were certain distinctive conditions to undertake *ijtihad*; however, the first sentence in the passage quoted above seems to be somewhat problematic. If “No single person is qualified enough for the *ijtihad* tasks,” then what is the point of

talking about those qualifications, or rather how could the situation be addressed? This actually leads us to the question of approach which Sheikh Yassine also considers of crucial importance in order for *Ijtihad* to yield the expected results.

To be fair, Yassine is not alone to stress that “No single person is qualified enough for the *ijtihad* tasks.” Other contemporary scholars and thinkers have emphasized the same point and it is no wonder.¹⁸ Given the increasing and challenging issues facing Muslim societies nowadays and the unprecedented advances in the various fields of knowledge which have become relevant to the *ijtihad* making, it is practically impossible to have the required expertise in all fields and tackle the job alone. To overcome this problem, Yassine suggests that it should be conducted collectively. Past is the time when it was carried out by individual jurists or scholars. That is no longer possible, nor is it viable as an approach not only because of its shortcomings among which the promotion of disagreement about petty matters, but also because of its inability to fulfill the needs of modern-day society. Hence, it is indispensable that it should be organized and conducted by an institution at the disposal of which all the necessary means and resources should be available to carry out its mission.¹⁹

Furthermore, *ijtihad* should not only be collective but also consultative. Due to the nature of the issues to be debated, views are bound to differ. In this case, opined Yassine, it would be better to try to achieve, through dialogue, unanimity as far as possible; otherwise, the majority decides.²⁰ This position is justified by verses from the Quran which enjoin *shura* (consultation) and a number of sayings of Prophet Muhammad in one of which it is reported that:

I [‘Ali bin Abi Talib] said to the Prophet, “O, Prophet, [what if] there is a case among us, while neither revelation comes, nor the Sunnah exists.” The Prophet replied, “[you should] have meetings with the scholars – or in another version: the pious servants – and consult with them. *Do not make a decision only by a single opinion* [Italics mine].²¹

A third feature of the approach to be adopted is that it should be comprehensive because, as Yassine explains:

To look [at the issue] from a narrow perspective, the perspective of a judge, or a jurist concerned with individual cases or an intellectual keen on abstract thinking, will not enable us to bring about the comprehensive and methodological *ijtihad* that covers the great expanse of the end-goals of Islamic law.²²

A fourth feature is that it should be balanced, neither too rigid nor too loose. In the former case, at best it will only “bring about a traditional structure that preserves the inherited pattern;”²³ in the latter, it may lead to the demise of Islam altogether. And this is no exaggeration. In his book, *Notes on Islamic Jurisprudence and History*, Sheikh Yassine quotes a modern Arab writer as saying that the meaning of “God” varies, depending on the situation of each person. “To the hungry person, God means bread; to the enslaved, he means freedom; to the oppressed, justice; to the emotionally deprived, love.”²⁴

The fifth feature is that the end-goals of *Sharia* should be presented as demands for something that is virtually lacking or has been tampered with, and not as something that is living and thriving and only needs to be protected. This is a truly novel idea, regardless of whether we agree or disagree with it. To the best knowledge of this author, no other Muslim scholar or thinker has ever considered the end-goals of the *Sharia* from this perspective since they were first elaborated by Imam Shatibi, a great scholar and jurisconsult (*Faqih*) who lived in Granada, Spain, in the fourteenth century (died in 1388).

To sum up, the major concern underlying the conception of *ijtihad* as it is understood by *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* and its leader and theoretician, Abdessalam Yassine is not merely to stress the importance of an Islamic principle. That is a point that is also and already emphasized by other contemporary Muslim scholars and intellectuals. But the major concern is how to secure quality, lucidity, and effectiveness. How to use this principle which is of great importance in Islamic jurisprudence and teachings to devise a viable blueprint for the rise of Islamic countries after centuries of injustice, humiliation and hardships under authoritarian hereditary regimes? How to use this powerful tool to sharpen people’s awareness of their plight and set them on the road to freedom and dignity? How can *ijtihad* serve to generate ideas, insightful, rational but not devoid of warmth and passion?

In other words, how can it secure knowledge, lucidity, self-motivation and strengthen people's determination to take positive action?

All the ideas discussed above concerning the concept of *ijtihad* such as the decisive importance of moral and spiritual dimension, the need for a free environment and for a collective as well as consultative approach and an organized institution, the necessity to consider the end-goals of *Sharia* in a way different from the classical one, and the active involvement of proponents of *ijtihad* and other details which, for a lack of space, could not be covered here, all seem to present a view of *ijtihad* that is different, at least in some respects, from other contemporary views on the same issue.

4.2 *Fitna*

The word "*fitna*" is another concept of great importance in the thought of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*. Though it is used widely among Muslims and occurs frequently in religious as well as literary and historical Islamic sources, it seems that *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* is the first and the only Islamic movement to have picked it up and underlined its importance and relevance to overcome some thorny theoretical and practical issues concerning reform efforts in Arab and Islamic countries. What does *fitna* mean and why is it claimed to be more appropriate to apply to contemporary Muslim societies than for example, *jahiliyya*, another concept adopted by other Muslim thinkers, namely al-Mawdudi and Sayyed Quotb? What are its implications for the view and strategy pursued by *al-Ald wal-Ihsan* to reform society and government from an Islamic point of view?

According to *Lisan al-Arab*, one of the most extensive Arabic dictionaries by Ibn Mandhur, the term *fitna* conveys many shades of meanings with a common thread referring to trial, ordeal, test, and tribulation. Its origin, says Ibn Mandhur, is derived from the action of putting gold and silver through fire to find out whether they are of good or bad quality or to burn off their impurities. Hence, the individual may be put through hardship to test his or her character. In the Quran the term and its variations, mentioned at least sixty times, refer to the trials, temptations, and the

suffering that man may go through here in this world and in the after-life. In the *hadith* [the sayings of Prophet Muhammad] the term is also used to describe a situation when it is hard to distinguish between right and wrong and truth and falsehood leading to social and political disorder or fragmentation. Hence, it is widely used in historic Islamic records to refer to divisions and internal conflicts which happened in the early years of Islamic history, starting with what is called the Great *Fitna* which took place after the assassination of the third caliph Uthman ibn Affan in 656 CE.

In the collections of *hadiths*, we find whole sections devoted to *al-fitan* [pl. of *fitna*] and there are a number of reports about the trying events that the Islamic *Umma* has to confront in the course of its history: social and political rebellions, in-fighting, usurpation of power and the like. In some cases the Prophet warns against some specific events, indicating their time and perpetrators, but in other cases he does not specify and his recommendations are given in general terms. Nevertheless, in most cases he warns against taking part in social disorder and anarchy and adamantly prohibited bloodshed.²⁵

What is worthy of notice here is that those recommendations have been interpreted as an obligation to obey rulers even if they are unjust for the sake of public interest. With the passage of time, each generation succumbed even more to the existing oppressive powers until “the religion of submissiveness”, to use Ibn Khaldun’s terms, became the norm and ruled out any endeavours to seek reform and change. Islamic texts should be examined in their entirety and if some of them, argues Yassine, do in fact recommend patience, there are others which call for action, heralding a new future for the Islamic *Umma* after a long history of suffering under despotic rule. Why should we ignore these, implies Yassine, and only focus on those concerned with “special circumstances”? There is no evidence that the latter should constitute a principle to be observed at all times and in all places. Nor is there any indication that Muslims have only two options: either to engage in armed struggle causing thereby civil war and bloodshed or to keep quiet.²⁶ Yet, the fear of the worst, that is, disorder and social anarchy, appears to have been pushed to its

extreme, and this has played into the hands of corrupt rulers who have been able to stay in power throughout most of the Islamic history.²⁷

4.2.1 A crucial question:

The question which Sheikh Yassine had to address well before he started his organized action in September 1981 is what description best fits the current situation of Muslim societies. This is indeed a crucial question whose answer would determine not only the attitude to take towards society and government but also the nature of strategies to be adopted to help bring about social and political reform in a country where absolutist hereditary monarchy has been in place for many centuries.

Before Yassine, other Muslim intellectuals debated the same question and put forward views which triggered so much controversy in the Islamic world. Sheikh Abul A'ala Mawdudi (1903 – 1979), a prominent thinker and writer of his time and founder of Jamaat-e-Islami in Pakistan, discussed in his works the current situation in the world in general and in Muslim countries in particular and brought forth his controversial concept of *jahilliya*.²⁸ Sayyid Qutb (1906– 1966), another well-known Muslim intellectual in Egypt, took up the same idea and elaborated on it further in his writings, namely in his influential book, *Milestones*.

Jahiliyya, translated in various terms such as “Ignorance of divine guidance”, “Days of Ignorance”, “the Age of Ignorance”, actually refers to the condition of the Arabs in the pre-Islamic era, that is, prior to the revelation of the Quran to Prophet Muhammad. In the last century, however, Mawdudi and later Sayyid Qutb extended the term and applied it to any human society regarded as displaying features similar to those which were prevalent in the pre-Islamic period of ignorance. Accordingly, present-day Muslim societies cannot be considered Islamic. Sayyid Qutb explained:

We are today in a jahiliyya similar to that contemporaneous to Islam or worse. Everything around us is a jahiliyya: people's perceptions and beliefs, habits and legislations. Even much of what we think of as being Islamic culture, Islamic sources or Islamic philosophy and thought is in fact the making of this jahiliyya.²⁹

The problem with such a view lies not only in the kind of ideas it has generated but also in the way it has been understood and translated on the grounds by certain groups, though they only represent a small minority compared to the mainstream Islamic trend. A number of violent and catastrophic events have indeed taken place. Condemned and rejected by Muslims all over the world, such mindless acts have neither helped to solve Muslim societies' problems nor increased their chance to realize their long cherished dreams of justice, freedom and progress. In fact, they have created more problems than they have solved and it is no wonder. Claims about the regimes' dirty involvement in such incidents may not be dismissed as mere rumours, especially now that many scandalous practices have been uncovered after the fall of the Tunisian, Egyptian and Libyan dictators.

Sheikh Yassine has been very adamant in his rejection of the view according to which Muslim societies are taken to be *jahili* and vehemently criticizes it in his earlier writings, starting with his first book, *Al-Islam byna ad-Da'wa wa ad-Dawla* [Islam between the Call and the State] which he published in 1971, about ten years before *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* movement saw the light of day. Then, he elaborates his ideas about the issue in his later works. In *Tanweer al-Muminat*, for example, he writes:

Are we going to separate ourselves from the *Umma's* present and flee our Muslim societies, ascribing unbelief to them all and branding them of *jahiliyya* as if our hearts are filled with the light of guidance and piety while others are all darkness, polytheism, *bid'ah*³⁰ and unbelief?³¹

He goes on to discuss the concept of *jahiliyya*, using numerous rhetoric questions to expose its irrelevance and its dire consequences. Though the answers to such questions are evident, Yassine does not want to leave room for any doubt and responded with an emphatic "No". Then he adds that he would rather use the term *fitna* to describe Muslim present conditions and societies. It is more appropriate, he argues, not only because it is in line with the Sunni view which is extremely cautious when it comes to ascribing unbelief to any person but also because it allows for a balanced and well-informed position that is not tainted by ignorance or extremist ideologies.³²

Yassine warns against some common simplistic ideas such as the one to the effect that the first period of Islam was divided into two separate, clear-cut blocs: one was of pure angels and the other of devils and unbelievers. Even those who embraced Islam, he argues, did not rid themselves all at once of all the traces of their former *jahili* lifestyles.³³

Commenting on the gradual change which occurred in the lives and behaviour of the first people who embraced Islam, Yassine stresses that though they were regarded Muslims once they uttered *shahada* [there is no god but God], it does not mean that they became perfect on the spot or that they could ever become so. He even wonders whether the first Islamic community was ever thoroughly free from all the remnants of *Jahiliya*.³⁴ If such a thing could not be confirmed, Yassine seems to infer, then how can we expect the Muslim society of today and of tomorrow to be of angelic purity; otherwise, it should be dismissed as guilty of unbelief, *jahiliya*, *bid'ah*, and flagrant error?

In case some people may be surprised by these ideas, Sheikh Yassine cites two *hadiths* [sayings] of the Prophet to support his view. In the first it is reported that Abu Dhar, one of the Prophet's Companions, reviled a man and spoke ill of his mother. Then the Prophet said to him: "O! Abu Dhar, did you speak ill of his mother? You are a man who still possesses a trace of *jahiliya*." In the second *hadith* the Prophet spoke of four traits of *jahiliyya* in his *Umma* that they would never relinquish... The lesson Yassine intends to underscore here is that human society can never be purified of all its weaknesses and shortcomings. This does not mean, however, that the Muslim should lose hope or feel frustrated. "On the contrary, he should be inspired by such *hadiths* to feel comfortable advocating "the easy way with a view to continuously striving for reform. 'Verily never God changes the condition of a people until they [first] change that which is [not good] in their hearts.'"35

4.2.2 Implications of the *fitna* concept

The question that arises now is: what are the implications of using “*fitna*” instead of “*jahiliya*” to describe contemporary Muslim societies? In the view of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* they are highly significant in all spheres, social, political, intellectual, religious, and psychological. Furthermore, the concept of “*fitna*” would help to understand the movement’s behaviour and attitude towards a number of issues and the type of strategy it advocates to bring about social and political reform in Morocco. In a later chapter we will discuss this in detail, but for the moment only a few important points will be raised briefly here.

Firstly, since the application of the *fitna* concept to Moroccan society excludes the idea of *jahiliya*, it follows that violence or the use of force as a means to achieve social and political change is rejected categorically. *Al-Adl wal-Ihsan* is clear about this since it was set up in September 1981. It stressed, from the beginning, in speeches as well as in published and unpublished documents what it called the three “NOs”, a tripartite motto the first component of which is “No to Violence”. Some have claimed that this is a mere tactical slogan to find a convenient place on the political scene, but *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* has been successful to demonstrate that it is a matter of principle to the extent that it has become a confirmed fact recognized at the national as well as the international level. Jeune Afrique, a well-known weekly newsmagazine published in Paris, had on the front page of one of its issues a headline featuring *Al-Adl wal-Ihsan* as a rampart against terrorism.³⁶ This is not the only “certificate of good conduct” which *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* has received. Many Moroccan as well as foreign observers recognize the crucial role it has played to keep the Moroccan youth away from violence.

Furthermore, *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* has been put to the test and has shown that, in this respect at least, it practises what it preaches. For more than three decades it has been subject to various repressive measures ranging from long-term imprisonment and abject torture in detention centres to other forms of ill-treatment causing in certain cases severe injuries. Yet, *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* has never been lured to get involved in violence. There are many videotapes showing the brutal intervention of

the police and some of these scenes have been aired on international TV channels. This is something that members of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* are now very proud of, though senior members admit that at the beginning it was hard, particularly for the youth, to appreciate such an attitude.

Besides writing extensively about the issue, Sheikh Yassine has made many speeches warning against violence, reiterating now and again a saying by the Prophet to the effect that “God is gentle and likes gentleness and rewards for gentleness what he does not reward for harshness.”³⁷ It is a childish practice, he argues, to which they resort only those who do not have confidence in their project and consequently seek to impose their ideas on others by force. Addressing a meeting of women and men, he said:

I have heard that some of you are frustrated and get angry because their young daughters don't want to wear *hijab* or their sons do not perform their prayers regularly or not at all. They get angry and they might be tempted to use force. I warn you. Do not resort to violence. There's never any good in violence. Do not impose anything on your children. Remember that your child is a human being. It is not an iron rod that you can put into fire and then mould it the way you like. Unless they are convinced, you should not and you cannot impose anything on them. It should come from within.³⁸

Secondly, the concept of *fitna* has its bearing on the kind of strategy espoused by *al-Adl wal-Ihssan* to seek reform in Morocco. The members are fully aware that social and political change cannot be realized overnight, nor can it be imposed with the stroke of a pen or by a simple administrative order. Change is a process. It takes time and requires energy, innovation, determination and a lot of sweating. However, though the prevailing harsh circumstances represent *fitna* par excellence, one should not despair or feel frustrated as long as he or she is deeply involved in serious endeavours to bring about the aspired reform or at least to promote the suitable conditions for achieving it.

Thirdly, the adoption of *fitna* concept is intended to stress the necessity to avoid thinking in black and white terms and oversimplifying what is in fact very complex. Social reality is not as simple as it might appear in the writings of those who wrongly applied the term *jahiliyya* to it. There are plenty of colours and nuances

and as a result society cannot be divided into two distinct groups: the good guys and the evil ones. Such a society does not and has never existed anywhere.

Finally, the concept of *fitna* has allowed for a fresh reading of Islamic history which, in the view of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, is more realistic and objective. There is no denying that there have been brilliant achievements of which Muslims can rightly be proud of. Yet, this should not blur our vision or blunt our senses to the extent of not seeing the other side of the coin. One of the greatest disasters which occurred in Muslim history yet, strangely enough, still denied by some *Ulama*, is that political authority was hijacked in the early years of Islamic history and that much of the suffering which Muslims have been going through to this date goes back to and emanates from that catastrophic event.³⁹ According to *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, to consider Muslim history through the *fitna* lens allows for a balanced perception which acknowledges the positive achievements but in the mean time highlights the source of all or most trouble in the Islamic world, that is, despotic hereditary rule. It also allows for a balanced view of individuals, whether rulers or ruled, scholars or laymen.

In sum the concept of *fitna* is of special importance in the thought of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*. It helps to understand how *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* has tried to provide possible answers to thorny questions in the Islamic thought, namely the attitude towards society, government and history, and to shape a strategy which is deemed more suitable to overcome the present predicament in Morocco and seek a better future.

4.3 *Ihsan*

Of all the key concepts in the thought of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, the term *ihsan* is placed at centre stage. The leader of the movement devoted a voluminous book of two volumes and much of *al-Minhaj an-Nabawi* book to the subject. As a matter of fact, there is not a single book or speech by Sheikh Yassine in which he does not allude to the notion of *ihsan* to stress its importance whatever the nature of the topic under discussion. When the movement decided to take on a new name in 1987, it chose one which brought the term *ihsan* into relief to signify that it is at least as

important as the other demands, namely justice. It is indeed this obvious emphasis on the spiritual and ethical dimension of Islam which makes the discourse of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* appear in the eyes of some observers and researchers “unusual”, “peculiar”, “distinctive”, “difficult to categorise” and other epithets to the same effect are also used, which indicates no small amount of bewilderment. This section seeks to shed light on this concept, its meaning, its importance and its implications for an Islamic opposition force engaged to press, from its own perspective, for social and political reform in Morocco.

Arabic dictionaries tell us that *ihsan* means doing something in an excellent manner and also doing someone a favour. It derives from *husn* which is translated in English as “beauty”; its opposite is *kubh* and *su`* meaning “ugliness” and “repulsiveness”. In the Quranic and the *Sunna* terminology, however, the word *ihsan* is employed to convey different layers of meaning of which three will be cited here. The first is that you should worship God as if you see him, for even if you do not see him, he sees you. The second is that you should do what is good and beautiful towards your parents, your spouse, children, relatives, friends, all people regardless of their colour, race and religion, the poor and the needy and also the ecosystem. The third is that you should perform whatever you are entrusted with in an excellent manner: a job, a task, a public office or any other activity.⁴⁰ Hence, it is not surprising that there should be no English equivalent for the term *ihsan*. Various translations have been used: charity, beneficence, and spirituality, but none of these could be claimed to be accurate, though perhaps for the lack of a better alternative spirituality and ethics may be used.

According to Yassine, the various meanings of *ihsan* coalesce to provide us with the basic characteristics in order for the Muslim to be a good, responsible citizen, able to make significant contribution to his and her society and promote the conditions for a better life in this world and a good preparation for the life to come in the hereafter. Those who worship God as is his due, observe the basic practices of Islam, perform what is beneficial to people and society and have good intentions, then they should be a blessing not only to their close community but all mankind. Commenting on a *hadith* in which the Prophet says, “Verily, God loves,

when one of you is doing something, that he or she does it in the most excellent manner,”⁴¹ Yassine points out that to serve society does not depend only on good intentions and the willingness to get engaged, but also on the acquisition of the required expertise, skills and the ability to perform one’s task well.⁴²

The term *ihsan* appears to be broad in scope, fit to convey a range of deep, positive meanings and attitudes and, above all, well rooted in Islamic culture. This explains to a great extent why it has been chosen by Yassine to stress the importance of spirituality and ethics in the Islamic renewal. Some critics, however, regard Yassine’s emphasis on *ihsan* as too much exaggerated, most probably, it is argued, as a consequence of his past Sufi experience. Others go further to claim that the leader of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* is just playing on words to circumvent controversy and that what he calls *ihsan* is but Sufism, pure and simple. This is though Yassine has reiterated in writing as well as in speech that he is not a Sufi, without denying he was.⁴³ His detractors seem convinced that the old man has not changed in the least and that he is, as he has always been, a confirmed Sufi. Hence, a number of articles and even books have been published to attack what they describe the Sufi deviations of Yassine’s thought.⁴⁴

Such developments have prompted Yassine to devote a voluminous book titled *Al-Ihsan* where he explores the issue in detail, clarifying as best as he can what he thinks of Sufism and explaining why it is *ihsan*, and not Sufism, which is more appropriate in the present time to cater for the spiritual thirst of large sections of the Islamic *Umma*, including even many young advocates of an Islamic order. In an attempt to dispel any possible misgivings, Yassine makes it clear from the beginning that it is not his intention to call to Sufism. “I like neither the name,” he says, “nor the form because I cannot find them in the book of God or the *Sunnah* of the Prophet.”⁴⁵ His intention, as he explains, is rather to discuss the issues related to Sufism quietly to help promote a better understanding of the subject and be able to distinguish between truth and falsehood and what is beneficial and acceptable and what is not.

As a basis for discussion, Yassine chooses one of the most famous *hadiths* and uses it as a model to expound his understanding of Islam in general and the concept of *ihsan* in particular. Given its crucial importance, part of the *hadith* will be quoted here:

'Umar ibn al-Khattab said: One day when we were with God's messenger, a man with very white clothing and very black hair came up to us. No mark of travel was visible on him, and none of us recognized him. Sitting down before the Prophet, leaning his knees against his, and placing his hands on his thighs, he said, "Tell me, Muhammad, about Islam."

The Prophet replied, "Islam means that you should bear witness that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is God's messenger, that you should perform the ritual prayer, pay the alms tax, fast during Ramadan, and make the pilgrimage to the House of God if you are able to go there."

The man said, "You have spoken the truth." We were surprised at his questioning him and then declaring that he had spoken the truth. He said, "Now tell me about Iman (faith)." The Prophet replied, "Faith means that you have faith in God, the angels, the Books, the messengers, and the Last Day, and that you have faith in the measuring out, both its good and its evil."

Remarking that he had spoken the truth, he then said, "Now tell me about Ihsan." The Prophet replied, "Ihsan means that you should worship God as if you see him, for even if you do not see God, God sees you." (...)

Then the man went away, and the Prophet informed them it was Gabriel who came to teach them their religion.⁴⁶

What is interesting about this *hadith*, which Muslims everywhere and for over more than fourteen centuries must have had the chance to be familiar with if not to learn by heart in early childhood, is not only the clarity and importance of its content but also the circumstances in which it was revealed. In a contemporary study, Murato and William Chittick have rendered the event in such a vivid description in an attempt, as they say, to bring it closer "to a reader situated many centuries and miles away."⁴⁷

They have pointed out to a number of strange facts which added a lot to the significance of the event. One of these is the sudden appearance of a strange man. He could not be a traveller because he showed no signs of travel; and he could not have come earlier because the people of Medina knew each other and

would have known about his arrival. Another strange fact is that the man seemed to be familiar with the Prophet. A third fact concerns the way in which the interview was conducted: each time Muhammad answered the man's question, the man said, "You have spoken the truth." A fourth important fact relates to the Prophet's final comment when the man left: "That was Gabriel. He came to teach you your religion." The authors conclude that "No one was supposed to forget about this visit...[and] if they ever wanted to know what was essential in Islam, all they had to do was to remember the strange events of that day."⁴⁸

Sheikh Yassine has made similar remarks about the circumstances in which the Prophet's Companions came to know about this *hadith* to underline its special significance and concludes that:

Islam is an ascent; it is not a stationary state. The first rung is that of the practicing Muslim, attentive to fulfilling the obligations the law prescribes for every Muslim. The second rung is that of *Iman* [faith], a higher degree, where worship and moral rectitude are on a par. The third degree, *ihsan*, is the springboard for the great spiritual journey and its infinite space.⁴⁹

This passage which tells in a nutshell how Yassine understands Islam should trigger no controversy, for it actually belongs to a mainstream perception among Islamic scholars. Yassine has only told the *hadith* of Gabriel in another way using some figures of speech to convey the idea of upward spiritual and moral motion. Other Muslim (and even non-Muslim) thinkers have used similar metaphors such the three-dimensional reality of Islam⁵⁰ or the three-level edifice of faith⁵¹ and the like to express the same idea. Yassine himself points out that he would rather prefer "the image of a building that is being built slowly and surely..."⁵² The reason, as he explains, is that "the progress on Islam's path to moral and spiritual perfection is a construction, and the fulfilling of the obligations of its law are the bricks and cement, with prayer foremost."⁵³

The message he intends to bring home here through the use of such figures of speech is that *ihsan* cannot possibly be achieved outside the framework of *Sharia* and that he, like mainstream scholars of Islam, disapproves of any method that ignores the established rules of Islam. "You cannot build on a void and with

nothing,” he affirms.⁵⁴ However, he also disapproves of the practice of those who may be learned in the matters of *Sharia*, yet they present them in “in dry terms, emptied of their core substance,”⁵⁵ and, above all, get involved in endless quarrels about trivia. Yassine refuses both extremes and warns his readers to be on their guard if they come across what he describes as “Sufis inebriated with their spiritual ecstasy.”⁵⁶ “Take to heart their advice to love God,” he says, “and ignore the rest.”⁵⁷ And if they encounter the type of learned men referred to above, he advised them likewise to heed “their words of knowledge” and avoid getting “enmeshed in pointless quarrels and sectarian rigidity.”⁵⁸

If *ihsan* is not possible outside the framework of *Sharia*, Yassine believes that it is not possible, save exceptional cases, without spiritual guidance either. “A spiritual guide is needed,” he explains, “for the highest degree, since the trip is long and the road is full of snares. A spiritual guide, tutor, is required until the plant of the spiritual being takes root and grows in strength.”⁵⁹ Here lies one of the major points in Islamic thought which has been open to debate for centuries and it is not expected to close any time soon.

Broadly speaking, two trends have developed. Adherent of Sufism, including eminent Sufi scholars and figures like Imam Al-Ghazali and Abdelkader al-Jilani and many others believe that spiritual guidance is not a mere recommendation; it is rather an unavoidable prerequisite for *ihsan* seekers. Others, however, represented by Wahabi inspired Salafists, maintain that the spiritual guide is not required at all and that it is within the reach of every individual to achieve moral and spiritual perfection without any assistance. Members of contemporary Islamic movements are divided on the issue, depending on the source from which they derive their inspiration. Detractors of Yassine often raise this point as evidence that Yassine’s claimed rupture with Sufism has never taken place and he is just trying to eschew embarrassment.

In his book, *Ihsan*, Yassine discusses the idea of spiritual guidance and a lot of other issues in detail, making use of a wide range of authentic Islamic texts and references to prominent Islamic scholars who are widely respected to this day. This

is not the place to review a book of more than one thousand pages, but a few points need to be made here. One is that by stressing the spiritual and ethical dimension of Islam, Yassine is not actually inventing anything new; he is just emphasizing something that is part and parcel of Islam as the *hadith* of Gabriel referred to above shows. If some people choose to ignore it, that is their business; but they cannot claim that those who want to give it the attention it deserves are talking heresy. The balanced view that Yassine advocates is that no aspect of Islam should be neglected or exaggerated at the expense of others.

Yassine also asserts that when he states that the Sufis have indeed preserved the science of *ihсан*, he does not mean that all those who raise the banner of Sufism are to be trusted or are above criticism. He distinguishes, for instance, between the type of Sufism which is compliant with the Quran and the *Sunnah* and the philosophical type which he rejects categorically.⁶⁰ He disapproves of anything that is not in line with the established precepts of Islam.

Furthermore, Yassine shows that he is not alone to stress the relevance of spiritual guidance. Throughout the Islamic history, many eminent Muslim scholars embraced Sufism and some, such as Imam al-Ghazali and many others, talked or wrote detailed accounts of their personal experiences. They were unanimous in their agreement that spiritual supervision is necessary and that to rely on books would not help in this respect. Other scholars, though they did not adhere to Sufism, did not reject the idea and were generally respectful of *Sharia*-abiding Sufism.

Some writers claim that Yassine's position towards Sufism is rather ambiguous: on the one hand, he defends it and on the other he says he does not support it. Yassine explains that there is no ambiguity in his stance. He only means to prove that those who regard Sufism as something alien to Islam are wrong and maintains that thanks to these people, a precious part of Islam has been preserved, but he cannot call to or encourage Sufism for the simple reason that the Sufis are completely disengaged from socio-political matters, which he finds unacceptable nowadays. In fact, it was the major cause which made him sever his relationship

with the Boutchichi Zawiya. He could not find an excuse for their continuous disengagement and quietism when the Islamic *Umma* is undergoing the worst of times.

Finally, he remarks that those who are reluctant to consider this highly significant aspect of Islam, in theory as well as in practice, are virtually depriving themselves from a precious treasure whose benefits are beyond description. It is not just an idea that is supported by Islamic texts only; it is a reality that he himself has experienced. If the proof of the pudding is in the eating, as the English saying has it, he invites the sceptic to make a try for a few weeks or a few months, and then they could judge for themselves.

That said, could it be concluded that Yassine has made a case for the moral and spiritual aspect of Islam? It may be too early to say for sure, but judging from what has been achieved, it seems that his attempts have not been wasted. Until about two decades or so, the Wahabi-inspired approach to Islam had been dominant not only among apolitical Salafist groups but also among politically engaged Islamist groups. Now, the Islamic landscape especially in Morocco has changed, not in the sense that the other groups dropped their approach and adopted Yassine's, but rather another alternative based on a well-founded and balanced view has been put forward and has succeeded in achieving visibility. Some people may still disagree with some of his interpretations, but they cannot question the authenticity of the Islamic sources on which he relies. Furthermore, the fact that *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* has become in a relatively short time, the largest Islamic organization in Morocco is an indication that Yassine's approach has not been ignored.

Yassine's stress on spirituality and ethics has another implication which Henry Lauziere has investigated in detail in an interesting piece which was published in May 2005. In this paper Lauziere examines post-Islamist theory by using the religious discourse of Abdessalam Yassine and concludes that this theory "is unable to account for the fact that spirituality has been central to Yassine's discourse since 1972, that is, well before the alleged failure of political Islam."⁶¹ This is absolutely true; and if some individuals or groups have toned down their

demands or moved to quietist Sufism or shunned political issues because of an alleged crisis, with Sheikh Yassine it is the other way round. He moved from Sufism and became one of the major opposition figures in his country. Yassine's concern for *ihsan* is not, then, a reaction to a supposed political failure, as Lauziere has rightly shown, nor is it a way of self-promotion or a means to further any political ends, as some studies seem to imply.⁶² It rather reflects his deep religious conviction, as Lauziere has pointed out,⁶³ and has become part and parcel of the identity of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*.

4.4 Conclusion

The three concepts we have discussed in this chapter –*ijtihad*, *fitna*, and *ihsan*– are expected to give an idea, albeit concise, about the intellectual and the religious base of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* and thereby dispel some misconceptions and pave the way to understand the movement on its own terms. Each concept deals with an issue of special importance to the contemporary debate on how to reform society and government and restore vitality and dignity to the Islamic *Umma*. Though the terms and the related topics may not be new to some researchers, the way they are approached and the points raised present no small degree of novelty and originality.

In his discussion of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning), Sheikh Yassine does not dwell much on some conventional questions such as whether “the door of *ijtihad*” should or should not be open, nor does he concern himself with the search for more supportive evidence to prove its self-evident importance. What he rather thinks worthy of study is where *ijtihad* as a tool to tackle modern concerns is most needed, how to ensure quality and effectiveness and what purposes should be given priority. In other words how to utilize this powerful tool to foster the conditions for the Islamic *Umma* to regain its political freedom after a long history of despotism and to rise after years of decline and subordination.

Concerning the debate on how to perceive society from an Islamic point of view, Yassine uses the term *fitna* (trial) because he thinks it allows for a balanced view that excludes extremism as well as defeatism. Whereas some groups, wittingly or

unwittingly, seem to look at society from above, blaming it for the rampant social and moral ills and advocating any means even it involves violence to effect the required reform, *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* and its leader believe that this is neither permissible nor practical. It is not permissible because the use of violence, according to the Islamic teachings, is not allowed and can never be the right solution to Muslims' problems; and it is not practical because social change cannot be achieved overnight. It takes, among other things, time, perseverance, and active involvement. It should be noted that the intention here is not to seek reconciliation with a social reality that is undoubtedly far from rosy, but rather to invite the Muslim individual to understand but not condone and to get engaged but keep clear of some rash attitudes which create more problems than they solve.

As for the concept of *ihsan*, it is, in the view of *al-adl wal-Ihsan*, the beading cord of the necklace, the cornerstone of the whole edifice. Consequently, spirituality and ethics should be given due consideration in all walks of life and whatever the nature of the project undertaken, social, political, intellectual or economic. Is this too far-fetched? For Yassine, it is not. It is the core message of Islam and he has invested a lot of time and energy to demonstrate that it is no small issue he is trying to highlight. It is rather a position that is authentically supported by the Islamic texts, endorsed by viable historical experiences and adopted by high-calibre figures in Islamic history.

The three concepts covered in this chapter actually form part of a comprehensive view that seeks to integrate revelation and reason, spirituality and social justice, practicality and flexibility, intellectual initiative and organized action, all in a manner that makes a convincing case for social and political reform in theory as well as in practice. In the next chapter we will see how the attitude of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* towards some hot issues such as democracy, women's rights, and modernity is informed and determined by this line of thinking. Whether this approach is going to take root in contemporary Islamic thought remains to be seen. What we can note for the moment, however, is that its supporters in Morocco are still growing, which indicates that Yassine's intellectual endeavours in this respect have not gone unnoticed.

Chapter 5 Attitude towards some Controversial Issues

“During the 2010 mid-term election campaign [in USA], virtually every hard-charging candidate on the far right took a moment to trash a Muslim, a mosque, or Islamic pieties,” wrote Stephan Salisbury in July 2011.¹ A Muslim, according to an increasingly important group of politicians, is by definition anti-democrat, anti-modern, misogynist and above all a threat wherever he or she happens to be. It might be argued that this is just cheap political propaganda and Islam-baiting, as we all know, has nowadays become a common strategy to win a few more votes. The practice, however, is not confined there; similar stances do also exist in the academic sphere, though it is not clear whether they, too, are taken by “the far right”. One academic, for example, has chosen the term “repudiation” to define the position of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* and its leader Sheikh Yassine vis-à-vis the West and whatever originates from it. He even warns his readers not to be mistaken and regard Yassine as “a Western-style liberal democrat in sheikh’s clothing.”² The implication which is not hard to infer is that he is just “a traditional, Middle-Eastern illiberal autocrat in the customary sheikh’s apparel”, and therefore we should not expect from him and his group an enlightened outlook on democracy, modernity or women’s emancipation.

This chapter seeks precisely to discuss this issue and clarify many points in order to come close to understand where *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* stands in this respect and how it perceives such issues and the arguments that underpin its position. The first section of this chapter will focus on democracy, the second on modernity and the third on the status of women. The reason why these three topics are selected lies not only in the great importance they still command or the vast literature on the subject in which a large number of people, scholars and laymen alike, have contributed, but also in the fact that they are often used as a yardstick to assess the extent to which social and political trends in general and Islamic groups in particular are engaged with the modern world in which we live and whether they

hinder or promote the emergence and development of modern society in their countries. In the case of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, an established Islamic force which cannot be ignored in any attempt to undertake serious reform in Morocco, to understand its attitude towards these three issues acquires a special significance. So, let us take each issue in turn and start with democracy.

5.1 *Al-Adl wal-Ihsan* and democracy

“Is democracy a good thing?” This question, outside a restricted academic circle, might be considered provocative and it might prompt what could be regarded as an equally provocative answer: “Is there a better alternative?” This attests to the present popularity of democracy and the respect it generally commands though, as one notable scholar remarks, it “is not yet universally practised, nor indeed uniformly accepted.”³ It is rightly considered the best way so far devised to get rid of dark absolutism from which many a country still suffers. Many world initiatives, albeit some of which are undoubtedly controversial, have been taken to promote democracy or to spread it where it is claimed to be most needed.

Meanwhile, one of the themes which has been widely debated, especially over the last three decades, is whether the emergence of the Islamic movements in the Muslim world squares well with “the democratic age” in which we live or whether it is rather an unfortunate development, anathema to the global democratic climate. Simply put, do these movements constitute a major obstacle to the growth and development of democracy in Arab and Islamic countries or, on the contrary, a supportive force that should be recognized and respected? A word about this debate is of crucial importance before we proceed to examine the attitude of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* towards the issue of democracy.

5.1.1 Two broad trends

Roughly, we may speak of two broad trends of thought. One is deeply convinced that Islamists are not and can never be democratic for cultural, historical and religious reasons. The long history of authoritarianism in the Muslim World, it is argued, nearly fourteen centuries, the nature of the prevalent political culture and

the nature of Islam itself all constitute a major barrier to democracy. Elie Kedourie, one of the proponents of this school of thought, asserts that “The idea of representation, of elections, of popular suffrage, of political institutions being regulated by laws being guarded and upheld by an independent judiciary, the ideas of the secularity of the state [...] all these are profoundly alien to the Muslim political culture.”⁴

Therefore, the political movements which take Islam as their point of reference are not expected to endorse a democratic political system of rule. This argument is also stressed by Bernard Lewis, Samuel Huntington, Martin Kramer, Daniel Pipes and many others.⁵ One writer, possibly to demonstrate that there is no prejudice or Islamophobia involved in this perspective, claims that “In the light of modern democratic thought, Islam is no more, no less democratic than Christianity or Judaism. All three monotheistic religions, if proposed as constitutional foundations of the state, and if proposed as providing an ineluctable authority for the guidance of all significant human choice, are undemocratic or non-democratic.”⁶

To deal with such a phenomenon, proponents of this trend have put forward some suggestions though it is not clear which is the most preferred among them. In a speech delivered in May 1990, Dan Quayle said, “We have been surprised this past century by the rise of Communism, the rise of Nazism and the Islamic fundamentalism.”⁷ The parallelism in such a statement, as Dale Eickelman remarks, is staggering.⁸ Indeed, to put what he calls “Islamic fundamentalism” and “Nazism” side by side can only be shocking to any scholar who is familiar with Islamic culture and civilization. Perhaps the claimed similarity between those phenomena might somewhat be mitigated if Mr Quayle had cited other “surprising events” like the two World Wars which both claimed more than 100 million deaths, making them among the deadliest conflicts in human history. These and other incidents which were equally serious all happened in the century Mr Quayle referred to in his speech.

What is worthy of note, however, is the implication of Quayle’s statement. It does not involve just casual “enlisting” of some socio-political phenomena though they

may differ in nature as well as in rationale, but it rather indicates the course of action to be pursued to “make the world safer”. Another leading figure of US foreign policy went further to explain the situation and state explicitly what should be done. In 1992 Amos Perlmutter wrote in *the Washington Post* that “Islam, fundamentalist or otherwise” is incompatible with “liberal, human rights-oriented, Western-style, representative democracy,” and therefore Islamic religious movements “should be stifled at birth [*sic*].”⁹

As if Perlmutter’s suggestion on how to effect this “stifling at birth” policy were not clear enough, another scholar elaborates on the idea further and raises two options. The first is “When the security forces arrest or kill [*sic*] large numbers of the Islamist leaders and membership –without giving them the opportunity to portray themselves as martyrs of unjust repression– this inevitably leads to a weakening of these organizations.”¹⁰ The second option is to allow them to participate in elections and if they win, they will quickly realise that it is always much easier to be in the opposition than to govern a country effectively. Then they may have to compromise on their principles to deal with many thorny issues, and this “could lead to the Islamists’ demise.”¹¹

So it all depends on the intended policy. If it is to weaken the Islamic organizations, then the first strategy should be used, that is, to “arrest or kill large numbers of the Islamic leaders and membership without giving them [and this is important] the opportunity to portray themselves as martyrs of unjust repression;”¹² but if the aim is “their eventual demise”,¹³ then the democratic strategy should be implemented provided that all the necessary precautions are taken so that the Islamists would not make “the election that brings them to power the last one held.”¹⁴

That there should be some people who entertain such extreme ideas and rally for them secretly or overtly may not be surprising; extremists have always existed in all cultures and religions and in all times and places, but societies have always known how to protect themselves from whatever pathological tendency to violence, hatred and antagonism. What is really surprising is how such ideas can be couched in scholarly apparel and easily find their way to publication in academic

journals. If such articles may serve any purpose, one is certain: providing the appropriate materials which could trigger and feed extremism on the other side, of presumed Islamic hue.

The second trend of thought, however, differs drastically from the first in that it maintains there is nothing in the Islamic culture, or any other culture for that matter, that inhibits the emergence of a responsible and accountable government. Many scholars refute what is called “the concept of Arab and Muslim exceptionalism” advocated by the culturalist and Orientalist perspective and regard it as unfounded if not heavily prejudiced. Amartya Sen, for example, argues that there is no real basis for the alleged claim that Islam is “fundamentally intolerant of and hostile to individual freedom.”¹⁵ He refers to many Muslim rulers from India as well as from Turkey, Cairo and Baghdad who “provide good examples of both the theory and practice of political and religious tolerance.”¹⁶ He even asserts that many of these rulers “were often more tolerant than their European contemporaries,”¹⁷ and cites the case of the great Jewish scholar Maimonides who “had to run away from an intolerant Europe (where he was born) and from its persecution of the Jews to the security of a tolerant and urbane Cairo and the patronage of Sultan Saladin.”¹⁸

Sen does not deny that there can be some authoritarian writings within the Muslim as well as Asian traditions, but he affirms that the same thing is also true within Western classics, and the writings of Plato or Aquinas, let alone the substantive medieval literature which supported the inquisitions, are a case in point.¹⁹ Sen makes another observation which some people tend to overlook in their appraisal of democracy. The positive status, he remarks, which democracy enjoys nowadays is largely due to a consensus that only emerged with the Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution and was consolidated particularly in the last century. “To read this as a historical commitment of the West –over the millennia– to democracy and to contrast it with non-Western traditions would be a great mistake.”²⁰ Democracy is not, therefore, a very old practice in the West, and its birth and development were not smooth and unobstructed either. The bloody conflicts and the long struggles which accompanied its rise and evolution are all too well known. This tendency, in Sen’s view, of portraying democracy in the West as if it dated from

time immemorial and as if its progress had been easy flowing is a kind of oversimplification which unfortunately can be found not only in the writings of some government officials but also in the theories of well known scholars like Huntington and others.²¹

We have so far focussed on the ideas of Amartya Sen, a respected, Nobel laureate scholar, but he is not the only one who represent this school of thought. Other scholars like John Voll, Esposito and many others in the West have also stressed the idea that neither Islam nor its culture is the major barrier to the establishment of a modern, political system of rule. Voll, for instance, argues that “Islam has within its historic and theological repertoire of symbols and concepts the resources to create democratic discourses and to provide the foundations for systems of Islamic democracy.”²² Robin Wright, an American expert on the Middle East and the Muslim World, also confirms that “Islam is not lacking in tenets and practices that are compatible with pluralism,”²³ and cites “*ijtihad*” [independent reasoning], “*ijmaa*” [consensus], and “*shura*” [consultation] as examples.²⁴

Esposito raises a pertinent point to stress further the fallacy, in theory as well as practice, of the claim that Islam and the realities of the Muslim polities both constitute a major obstacle to democratic rule. He argues that if Islam is to be blamed just because some rulers have used it to try to legitimize their authoritarianism, then the same thing can be said about other religions. “Judaism and Christianity, the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, have been used to legitimize monarchies and feudalism in the past and democracy and capitalism as well as socialism in the present.”²⁵ In other words if some rascals have used Islam, or any other religion for that matter, to further their vested interests and continue to wield all levers of power, should we blame Islam or those “rascals” who, as we learn from history, would not hesitate to employ whatever they can think of, from religion, propaganda, tribalism, superstition to all sorts of “soft” and “hard” means to maintain the status quo? What if in the name of democracy a Western power, for example, invaded another country causing heavy losses in life and property for no good reason; should we hold democracy responsible for the resulting catastrophes or the people who misused the concept to seek illegitimate ends?

Even Fareed Zakaria, a well known journalist and author, who cannot be accused of being sympathetic to Islamists, has recognized the weakness of the culturalist-religious argument as an explanation of the absence of political accountability in the Muslim World. He argues that “Catholic Popes combined religious and political power for centuries in a way that no Muslim ruler has ever been able to achieve.”²⁶ He also points out that Islamic rulers were no more autocratic than other rulers in China, Japan, and Russia where they asserted themselves and were treated as if they were gods. Making reference to some sayings of the Prophet, he even contends that “Islam has anti-authoritarian streak that is evident in every Muslim land today.”²⁷

The question now is: if the claim that Muslim culture is not an impediment to the establishment of a democratic and accountable system of government, then what is the real obstacle? For Alfred C. Stepan, director of the Center for the Study of Democracy, Toleration and Religion, “the greatest obstacle to democracy is not posed by Islam but by military and intelligence organizations uncountable to democratic authority.”²⁸ In his study of the current Islamic movements in North Africa, John Entelis argues that “the only movements...insistent on democratic change, government accountability, the rule of the law, transparency and civilian authority are non-violent Islamist political parties.”²⁹ Contrary to the view held by writers belonging to the former school of thought, Entelis believes that Islamists do not constitute a threat to the democratic project. In fact, they are “best poised to promote substantive change.”³⁰ Then he stresses this idea which is also shared by other scholars endorsing this line of thinking: “As long as groups do not use violence, do not violate the rights of other citizens, and stay within the rules of the democratic game, all groups [including Islamists] are granted the right to advance their interests, both in civil society and in political society. This is the minimal institutional statement of what democratic politics does and does not entail.”³¹

5.1.2 Attitude of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*

Where does *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* stand in this debate? Does its attitude confirm the claims and the fears voiced by the former trend of thought or does it lend credence

to the views of the latter? Does it accept or reject democracy wholesale or does it stand for a vision of politics according to which democratic and Islamic principles can be brought together to work out a viable formula for a viable system of government able to win the trust and respect both inside and outside the Muslim World?

If we examine the body of works produced by *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* in which the writings of its leader Sheikh Yassine takes, of course, centre stage, we will find that the issue of democracy is given due consideration. Some of Yassine's books have been devoted totally to the subject, and the writer's appreciation of ideas advocated by the second school of thought comes as no surprise, particularly because they offer the opportunity to get to the heart of the debate without necessarily starting from scratch.

To address the question of democracy, Yassine raises two preliminary remarks. One concerns the closed manner in which the discussion is often framed by sceptics: "Are you for or against democracy?" To debate a complex concept like democracy, contends Yassine, in absolutist yes-or-no terms is not scholarly or appropriate, to say the least. It is usually intended to embarrass than to seek clarification, and sometimes whatever your answer, it makes no difference. Contrary to the rule which stipulates that every person is innocent until proved guilty, an Islamist, argues Yassine, is by definition guilty until he or she proves, if they can, innocent. If an Islamist says, "No, I don't want democracy; I want Islam," then the case is closed and he is dismissed on the spot as a confirmed advocate of authoritarianism. If he says, "Yes, I am for democracy," his answer would not be taken seriously and is likely to be ignored. However, if he refuses to be cornered and contends that the answer requires some explanation and that it would be simplistic to deal with such a concept in black-and-white terms, he is likely to be suspected of trying to dodge the question.³²

The other remark concerns the way in which democracy is presented by some people. They usually give the impression that it has "a single agreed meaning."³³ The reality is that democracy, as generally recognized, is an "essentially contested

concept,³⁴ and can take various forms some of which may seem contradictory.³⁵ Accordingly, how can we expect the answer to be either yes or no when the issue in question is “inherently debatable and changeable”?³⁶ It may be argued that “democracy is a term which, whatever its precise meaning, will always signify for many a cherished political principle or ideal.”³⁷ Debatable though this might be, the question is whether the people in the Arab and Islamic World should blindly applaud whatever shape democracy comes to take. When, yesterday, it meant the exclusion of large sectors of society from the vote, Muslims should have been happy and if tomorrow it takes another form, they should not hesitate to express their satisfaction.

Many scholars, aware nowadays of the “inherently debatable and changeable” nature of the term, have already started talking about “democracy with adjectives” as is reflected in terms like “liberal democracy”, “participatory democracy”, direct democracy”, “associative democracy”, etc. Such a development may render the debate even more complicated. Should Muslims, to stay on good terms with all forms, applaud all of them and claim that they all apply to their societies, or should they pick up one and brace themselves to quarrel with the rest?

Now putting aside the closed format in which the discussion is sometimes cast and the disputes “which are perfectly genuine”³⁸ concerning the meaning of democracy, we will proceed to adopt the approach pursued by some scholars who, in order to reduce the tension involved, speak of what they consider an acceptable minimal level of democracy. Robert Dahl whose definition is widely known among political scientists is taken here as a basis for discussion of the attitude of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* towards democracy. Dahl cites seven elements which are in brief as follows: 1) elected officials, 2) free and fair elections, 3) inclusive suffrage, 4) the right to run for office, though age limits may be higher for holding office than for suffrage, 5) freedom of expression 6) the right to seek alternative sources of information which should exist and be protected by laws, and 7) the right to form relatively independent political parties and interest groups.³⁹

According to Yassine “these are all noble objectives.”⁴⁰ If democracy only means that, then there is no reason for any quarrel or objection. In fact, he does not hide his admiration of such features and institutions. Commenting on the multiparty system, he says that “there is a great wisdom behind [it],” adding that if “democracy had not devised it, we, Muslims, would have to evolve one [...]”⁴¹ He recognizes, like many Muslim leaders and thinkers, the importance of learning, without any hesitation, from democracy how to organize elections and government, separation of powers, manage disagreement and diversity of opinions in a multiparty context and other techniques necessary for good governance. He argues that Muslims cannot possibly be against any of these objectives “for they are precisely what we as a community are raised for.”⁴² Yassine is well aware of the dire consequences of authoritarianism from which the Arab countries still suffer and, as a result, he does not hesitate to state in the clearest way possible that he wholeheartedly supports democracy when it delimits the authority of the rulers and provides for government accountability, genuine representation of the people, viable institutions and freedom of expression.⁴³

However, the problem emerges when some people are not satisfied with definitions like the one provided by Dahl and insist on other items such as the idea that democracy is not conceivable or possible without secularism. This entails that Islam and politics should be separated in the same way that the Church and state are separated in the Western context. This separation, it is argued, is “indispensable to good government and a free society.”⁴⁴

This way of viewing democracy is neither appreciated among mainstream Islamic movements, including *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, nor is it actually required for “good government and a free society” in an Islamic context. First, there is no general consensus on such a view of democracy and there is no reason, it is argued, why we should accept it and exclude others. Furthermore, to insist on secular democracy is to assume that the “world is a monolithic bloc” and that what works in Western societies should work everywhere, which is not true. The Islamic World has its culture, religion and history and it would be a great mistake to import and try

to implant in it a ready-made system, born and developed in a completely different context, and expect it to take root and bear fruit.

It appears that when some Western thinkers speak of religion, they have at the back of their mind the bitter experience Europe lived under the hegemony of the Church in the Middle Ages. No wonder that it is widely believed that the best solution is to relegate religion to the “private sphere”. It is then a position reflecting the influence of a certain historical experience. With the Islamic World the situation is different and such a measure would not be appropriate from an Islamic point of view. First, the bright moments in the Muslim history are those when Islam was closely observed and its principles were implemented; and second, it would mean for the Muslims a kind of schizophrenia: they may believe in God at home but outside they should ignore Him and His recommendations. And Islam does not condone this kind of double life. If this is permissible in one cultural setting, it does not mean that it should be the same in another or everywhere.⁴⁵

Such being the case, the core of the matter, in the view of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, is to define the real issue. If it is to combat authoritarianism and dictatorship and provide for a system of rule that guarantees accountability, freedom of expression, the rule of law, regular fair and transparent elections and other useful institutions, then there is no problem. That objective and the means required to achieve it, argues Yassine, does not necessarily entail that Muslims should have to sever their relationship with their religion and “just as a mind formed in a secular school is amazed at Islam’s mixing of the two spheres, we are [likewise] amazed at the oddness of separating private from public life and the mosque from parliament.”⁴⁶ However, if the issue is to “rubbish” religion and copy a model in which secularism is an essential constituent besides other ideological and philosophical underpinnings which are in stark contrast to Islamic principles and values, then that is a different story and a different agenda whose prospect of success in the Muslim lands is bleak if not nil, as the latest elections in Tunisia and Egypt after what is called the Arab Spring have shown. So it all depends on the real issue.

5.1.3 Fears and phobias

Some argue that if the idea of the secularity of the state is not taken into account, it is likely that a system of government based on Islam will lead to a theocratic regime which will confiscate the people's rights and liberties and incur all sorts of absurdities reminiscent of what happened under the Church and feudal institutions in the Middle Ages. Others also point out to the current Arab rulers who exploit Islam, among other things, to stay in power and deprive the people from their rights to have any genuine say in the public affairs of their countries.

Some fears may be legitimate possibly because there is no living model to refer to and the only experience which Muslims hold dear in their collective memory dates back to the first century of the Islamic calendar (i.e. 7th C.E.) However, they could easily be dispelled if an effort is made to understand that Islam is not a religion in the way the latter is understood in the West and that the Islamic World has not known an experience similar to the one the West had with the clergy in the Middle Ages. Hence, an extrapolation of the effects of Western historical events to Muslim societies is not appropriate for the simple reason that there is no clergy in Islam. This is why a government based on Islamic principles can never be theocracy, autocracy, plutocracy, or any other "formcracy" for that matter, that would deny the people the right to choose their leaders and their representatives and change them if deemed necessary. The Islamic texts themselves are crystal clear in this respect and it is not possible to interpret them in a way that legitimizes usurpation and tyranny.

As for the conduct of the past and present despots in the Islamic countries, it should not be taken as a justification to chase Islam from the political sphere. If we were to pursue this logic, we would have to reject also democracy because some old democracies have been responsible for many disasters. Just a few decades ago, more than one million people were killed in Algeria by the French colonial authorities just because the Algerian people wanted their independence. The same tragedy, though under different circumstances, happened again in 1990 when the Islamists emerged victorious in fair and transparent elections and were poised to

come to power. Thousands were killed and arrested and the whole process was suspended by Algeria's military junta with the complicity of some Western democratic powers.⁴⁷

Consider, furthermore, the present world order dominated by great powers most of which are very democratic. Yet, according to a United Nations report, "the richest 20% of humanity consumes 86% of all goods and services and generates 75% of the world's pollution and waste while the poorest fifth consumes just 1.3%."⁴⁸ Is it not paradoxical to combat poverty and all the "giant evils", to use Beveridge's words, at home and foster their conditions abroad through various means the least of which is to continue to support the corrupt potentates of all shapes in the Third World? If we want to cite the wrong policies and their disastrous consequences committed by governments whose democratic nature cannot be questioned, it would take volumes. Yet, do we have "to rubbish democracy" to use the words of Sen, altogether because of those inappropriate practices? If such reasoning cannot be endorsed, then Islamic values and principles cannot be jettisoned because of the conduct or rather misconduct of some rulers in the Muslim world.

Some critics may yet have another objection. They claim that the commitment of Islamic movements to democracy is rather tactical and there is no guarantee that they will relinquish power if they have the opportunity to come to it through elections. Maddy-Weizman, for example, argues that the major problem with Yassine's approach to democracy is that it "suffers from a crucial flaw: it envisions a democratic process in which Islam is established in power, it cannot envision a continuation of that process that might remove Islam from power."⁴⁹

It is not clear how Maddy-Weizman has come to that conclusion. Has he read all the forty books written by Yassine? Probably not. Even if he confined himself to the book he used, *Islamiser la modernité*, there is a statement in chapter 5 which, putting aside any ideological grudges, should not have escaped his attention. It reads: "Our assurances NEVER [*emphasis added*] to hang on power against the consent of the electorate will respond to the concerns of the political parties."⁵⁰

There are several reasons why *al-Adl wal-Ihsan's* declared intention that it would never stick to power "against the consent of the electorate" should not be dismissed as tactical. One is that *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* has a firm conviction that any system of government imposed from above cannot and will never succeed, and consequently nothing would lure *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* to adopt an approach that is doomed to fail. The second one is that given the nature of the modern state and the colossal tasks it faces, it is unlikely that any one party or organization, however popular it might be, has the capacity to always perform well and meet the people's expectations and can thus stay in power for ever. People are likely to seek change for one reason or another, and it is much better to have a system of rule that provides for smooth outgoing and smooth incoming and that guarantees the chance to return to power if the deficiencies are overcome and the mistakes are corrected than to stick to power until being kicked out by force.

A third reason is that "the international community," as one expert in economics and finance has pointed out, "is now unfriendly towards illegitimate governments [...]. Globalization is also acting as a check on despotic governments."⁵¹ An economic embargo could cripple a government if in the name of Islam attempted to maintain power against the will of the people.

A fourth equally important reason is that in the view of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* the only way to keep up the present dynamism of the Islamic movements is to have a system of government where power is accessible to those who are competent and chosen by the people, where losing does not threaten the security of the losers and winning does not guarantee the privileges of the victors. That is why Yassine, as noted above, speaks of the dire necessity of the opposition and he devotes significant space in his writings to the discussion of this issue. The moment, he argues, the Islamic movement considers having a monopoly on power, that would undoubtedly be the beginning of the end. It is a lesson confirmed by historical experiences that no rational human being should ignore.⁵²

The last but not least reason is related to the vision of society which *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* endorses and whose achievement in its view does not depend solely on

political action. Senior members of the movement are never tired of repeating that politics is only part of their project. As Yassine explains, “It is not an election or a turnover in power that we aspire to. [...] Our goal is the kind of deep change that only a direct and continuous action, with the help of God, is capable of initiating or directing.”⁵³ And in order for this “direct and continuous action” to be set in motion and be sustained, it should not be contingent on being in power; it should basically take root in society. It is a long term project, acknowledges Yassine, but there seems no other alternative.

To what extent can these reasons reassure the sceptics? One thing for sure is that ideological scepticism, like personal grudges, is hard to ease. Let us consider this example before closing this section. In the letter Yassine sent to King Mohammad VI, he writes that if the king were to take the required measures for reform, Morocco could move towards “genuine democracy [...] the only way out of the dark absolutism.”⁵⁴ The idea is crystal clear; yet one sceptic warns his readers not to be so naïve as to believe that Yassine is “a Western-style liberal democrat in sheikh’s clothing.”⁵⁵ What is more serious in such a claim is the message it seeks to bring home. The aim is not merely to underline “difference” but rather “stark contrast”. In other words, since Yassine is not “a Western-style liberal democrat,” he is automatically identified with the opposite image: “a Middle-Eastern-style illiberal autocrat” whose “endorsement of some democratic principles is utilitarian and conditional.”⁵⁶ The underlying message, therefore, is that nothing Yassine says should be taken seriously. It is interesting to note here the gross error that some academics may incur when scholarly accuracy is sacrificed at the expense of ideology and distrust is pushed to the extreme.

To conclude, *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* understands democracy as a procedure, a set of mechanisms to manage power, cope with differences and organize society and as such there is no reason for objection. On the contrary, it considers that there is a great wisdom behind such techniques and procedures and consequently it sincerely, not tactically, endorses them. However, if some people insist that the procedures cannot possibly be disassociated from the philosophical beliefs and values which contradict the Islamic worldview, *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* would still take the

mechanisms and ignore the rest. In any case, *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, seems to stand firm in its support of the idea that the final decision should be left to the people and their choice should be respected. It is the only way, in its view, to overcome the status quo, manage differences peacefully and avoid civil disorder.⁵⁷

5.2 *Al-Adl wal-Ihsan* and modernity

Alasdair MacIntyre writes in one of his books the following:

[...] When the sacred and the secular are divided, then religion becomes one more department of human life, one activity among others. [...] Only religion which is a way of living in every sphere either deserves to or can hope to survive. [...] If our religion is fundamentally irrelevant to our politics, then we are recognising the political as a realm outside the reign of God. To divide the sacred from the secular is to recognize God's action only within the narrowest limits. A religion which recognizes such a division [...] is one on the point of dying.⁵⁸

This abridged passage could well be written by a Muslim scholar, for if we remove the name of its author, a Muslim may not readily recognize that it has been written by a Christian philosopher. In a nutshell, the passage points to a major point of contention in the debate on Islam and modernity. As an Islamist movement, *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* is also concerned with the subject and it should be interesting to find out where it stands in this debate. This is what this section will try to do as it seeks to address the following questions: 1/ What is modernity? 2/ How is it perceived by Yassine and his group? 3/ And is there an "Islamic modernity"? Let us take each in turn.

5.2.1 What is modernity?

It is a question to which there is, unfortunately, no easy answer. Historians, sociologists, philosophers and experts from various fields of knowledge have addressed the issue, but they do not seem to agree on what the term means precisely. The problem is that the more publications one consults to be enlightened, the more unclear the term becomes.⁵⁹ Writers disagree not only on he

basic meaning of modernity but also over dates and the significant factors that were decisive to its emergence and development. However, this is not to say that the question should be ignored or left undisturbed in its well-protected ambiguity, but merely to stress that the concept and what it stands for is far from being a settled issue.

When the term “modern” came into usage, it simply meant “current”, “up-to-date”, “of recent origin” or something to this effect. Then it was used to situate the present in relation to the past and to convey a certain preference. At one moment, the past was held to be superior to the present; at another, it was the reverse. Various considerations were invoked to articulate one tendency or the other as it happened in the quarrel between *les Anciens et les Modernes* in 17th -century France. The use, however, that concerns us here and on which our discussion will focus is the one which usually refers to modernity as an epoch with distinctive features that distinguish it from an old traditional era. This is not to close the discussion; it only begins.

One of the problems with the usage just referred to is that no one can tell for sure when modernity as such started. Some writers claim that it was in the Renaissance period, in the fifteenth and sixteenth century, that modernity emerged.⁶⁰ Others would argue that the modern era did not actually occur until the eighteenth century on the grounds that it was a period during which the Enlightenment thought and other significant events such the Industrial Revolution and the French and the American Revolutions took place.⁶¹ Still others would go as far as to locate its emergence in the 12th century.⁶²

Considered from a rather different perspective, it is claimed that modernity has gone through three distinctive historical phases. The first extended from the beginning of the sixteenth to the end of the eighteenth century; the second started with the French Revolution and the subsequent uprisings in social, political and personal life; and the third was associated with what Berman refers to as “the global diffusion of the process of modernization and the development of a ‘world culture of modernism’.”⁶³

Contrary to the attempts which seek to fix a starting point for modernity, some writers would argue that the idea itself is neither relevant nor required. They believe that “the history of human society is a seamless continuum,”⁶⁴ and thus to try to set a starting point for the modern era is practically impossible. “Nowhere,” so goes the argument, “did the members of any society awake one morning to find themselves “moderns” when they had been traditionalists the previous night.”⁶⁵ Consequently, it would be more realistic to speak of “a longish period of history during which there is a clear transition in the balance of social arrangements from the primacy of a configuration to the primacy of another.”⁶⁶ It is, according to this view, “the predominant pattern that counts”⁶⁷ and not anything else. In case it were really necessary, argues Walters, to specify a date, it would only be an approximation and the turn of the nineteenth century would sound more plausible.⁶⁸

If the attempt to fix a commencement or an ending date for modernity is highly contested, to find out what the term exactly means is no less problematic. In *Spaces of Modernity*, Miles Ogborn writes:

Against the backdrop of the Enlightenment, modernity is associated with the release of the individual from the bonds of tradition, with the progressive differentiation of society, with the emergence of civil society, with the political equality, with innovation and change. All these accomplishments are associated with capitalism, industrialism, secularization, urbanization, and rationalization.⁶⁹

In a rather different analysis, it is argued that to define modernity, we need to make a distinction between its cultural and epistemological aspects on the one hand and its institutional aspects on the other. In the cultural and epistemological conception, modernity “is characterized by the emergence of the nation as an autonomous subject, the transition from an organic to a mechanistic world picture, and the embrace of human values and objective scientific inquiry.”⁷⁰ In the institutional conception, however, modernity is regarded as “a mode of social life or organization [...]. It is characterized by structures and processes such as industrialization, capitalism, rationalization and reflexivity.”⁷¹

It seems that the attempt to provide a clear, concise and uncontested definition, as is pointed above, is daunting if not impossible. This is probably why some writers have chosen another approach, that is, to speak about what they consider the basic features of modernity instead of struggling with an already great number of definitions which trigger more questions than they answer. However, they do not agree on the number of these characteristics. Stuart Hall, for example, identifies four:

1/ The dominance of secular forms of political power and authority and conceptions of sovereignty and legitimacy, operating within defined territorial boundaries...

2/ A monetarized exchange economy, based on the large-scale production and consumption of commodities for the market, extensive ownership of private property and the accumulation of capital on a systematic, long-term basis...

3/ The decline of traditional social order, with its fixed social hierarchies and overlapping allegiances, and the appearance of a dynamic social and sexual division of labour...

4/ The decline of the religious worldview typical of traditional societies and the rise of a secular and materialist culture, exhibiting those individualistic, rationalist, and instrumental impulses now so familiar to us.⁷²

Other accounts have identified more or less than twenty characteristics, and though they may converge on some aspects, they do diverge on others.⁷³ This approach, therefore, does not seem to solve the problem either; it only confirms the idea that modernity is highly controversial not only with regard to its historical emergence but also in terms of significance. The concept, as many critics have demonstrated, covers a wide range of aspects and ideas, but what is surprising is that some of them may be in stark contrast to each other. Yet, the space is still expanding and the boundaries are continuously being stretched further, and this is bound to make its use and understanding even more complicated. The Nobel Prize winner Octavio Paz may not very far from the reality when he describes modernity as “a word in search of its meaning.”⁷⁴ Until that daunting challenge is satisfactorily met, let us turn to the second question in this discussion.

5.2.2 Yassine's critique of modernity

In *Islamiser la modernité*, a book written in French in 1998 to discuss the subject in some detail, Yassine avoids, nonetheless, being trapped in the potentially endless debate over the various definitions of modernity and focus instead on the implications of some features which are commonly believed to be part and parcel of modernity. He makes it clear from the beginning that he does not deny the importance of the deep transformations which Western societies have undergone with the emergence of modernity and the indisputable benefits brought to people. His intention is not to argue about that, nor is it to wage war on modernity or the West, or incite hatred and antagonism among people. He intends to examine, calmly but frankly, some aspects of modernity and the threats they pose to humanity. He emphasizes that it is done out of love, hoping that it should be seen as “a hand of friendship for humankind, bearing the message of sense and justice for all human beings.”⁷⁵

He also speaks about the necessity of ample patience and tolerance in order for his views to be fully understood, “especially in a climate,” as he describes it, “where disinformation reigns along with rejection of the other.”⁷⁶ His analysis is based on a worldview that some may or may not share, but the important thing is that it should not be confronted with minds well retrenched “behind ready-made convictions, resolved to hear or understand nothing.”⁷⁷ To promote dialogue and mutual understanding requires, among other things, a willingness to hear what the other has to say and to do away with prejudice, doubt and suspicion; otherwise, communication becomes hard if not out of reach.⁷⁸

One of the significant criticisms levelled at modernity is what Yassine calls its underestimation, if not its contempt, of non-Western societies and of other cultures and civilizations. The reason is that modernity as “a socio-cultural and political manner of being,”⁷⁹ has been quickly overtaken by the view that it represents the summit of human condition that all societies should aspire to, and those that display signs of reluctance or resistance are immediately dismissed as inferior, prey to superstition, backwardness and ignorance and it is the duty of the West to

liberate them and convert them to its own way of life. This feeling of superiority, corroborated all the more by the scientific and technological achievements, has provided, argues Yassine, the pretext “for the military and economic colonization of the World of the South,”⁸⁰ and for turning it into a market as well as a depot of some harmful and polluting products.⁸¹

Another aspect which Yassine considers more serious is the attitude towards religions in general. Here he refers to *Critique de la modernité* by the renowned French sociologist Alain Touraine to illustrate this point. According to Touraine:

The most powerful Western conception of modernity, and the one which has had the most profound effects, asserted above all that rationalization required the destruction of so-called traditional social bonds, feelings, customs and beliefs, and the agent of modernization was neither a particular category or social class, but reason itself and the historical necessity that was paving the way for its triumph.⁸²

This is the most dangerous weapon of the lot, concurs Yassine, for it seeks to eradicate everything, without distinction, deemed ancient. And since all religions, including Islam, fall within the category of “ancient stuff” deemed traditional and consequently irrational, it is only natural that Islam should also be targeted by modernity. “To be modern [...] means one must rebel against the sacred, against the divine.”⁸³ And as Islam is based on divine revelation, it should be destroyed in order to clear the way for reason and the emancipation of human mind. Thus it becomes clear from this analysis that if Muslims want to secure a comfortable place in the modern world, they have to reconsider their attitude towards their religion and regard it henceforth “as something to be rejected [...] like some unworthy and shameful archaism.”⁸⁴

Admittedly, the West may have its reasons to live “its modernity essentially as a revolution against its past [...]”⁸⁵ It may have been affected by a long history during which “a dark, regressive alliance”, as Voltaire would put it, between the Church and certain despotic rulers was formed, resulting in the persecution of many eminent scholars like Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton to cite but a few and the exploitation of common people in the name of religion. All these things are true and are well-documented in the recorded history of Europe. However, it does not

justify correcting an error by another. Otherwise, modernity itself would have to be rejected because of the many serious problems it has so far engendered. Organized slavery whereby “millions of Africans were shipped to the Western hemisphere in subhuman conditions to run the plantation economies for generations,”⁸⁶ Stalinism, Hitlerism, the Holocaust, Hiroshima and Nagasaki disasters, colonization and predation of the resources of poor countries, support of corrupt rulers in the Third World and other forms of injustice and aggression have all occurred in the triumphant era of modernity. Does this justify a return to the Dark Ages?

Claimed to be, among other things, “a carrier of historical destiny, a collective missionary with the duty to spread the gospel of reason,”⁸⁷ modernity engaged in a wide and prolonged campaign, especially during and in the post-colonial period, “to pluck the faith from hearts or conviction from minds...by instilling and fomenting doubt in [the young], and by describing the revealed as fraud and lies.”⁸⁸ This is, in Yassine’s view, one of the most serious examples of aggression inflicted upon young people since Arab countries came under control of Western powers. Their consequences, argues Yassine, are more harmful than any economic or military invasion, for they seek to weaken the very basis of personality. This is how the culture of defeat takes root and the young find themselves, like a feather in the wind, unable to take their destiny in their own hands and decide on the course of action that befits their culture and secure their dignity.⁸⁹

Yassine also deplors the sacrifices made to satisfy a greedy, modern capitalist system. He refers to the negative consequences of the Industrial Revolution and how “the lives of millions of persons were turned upside down and plunged into anonymous suburban misery so that capitalism, whose sole allegiance was to profit, could prosper.”⁹⁰ It is worth noting here that some of Yassine’s criticisms of the capitalist system converge with those coming from the left, but his emanate from an Islamic perspective and not, as it is sometimes claimed, from an attempt to echo ideas which appeal especially to the poor and the downtrodden. For Yassine the excesses of capitalism are the logical consequences of a system that “worships

the god of profit” and not God, the Creator of the universe. Religion, if not ridiculed and ignored, is at best relegated to the private sphere.

One must admit that Yassine’s criticisms of modernity are sometimes very harsh, to say the least, but it would be wrong to assume that he and his group would go as far as to reject it altogether. As a matter of fact, neither Yassine nor any Muslim thinker of stature that this author is aware of calls for the total repudiation of modernity save a few isolated voices with no significant bearing on the dominant cultural and intellectual trend in Muslim societies. Islamist groups in general do appreciate modern positive achievements, but they do not subscribe to “the view that modernity is really one thing, towards which every society is inevitably moving, though at different rates of development.”⁹¹ They cannot understand why Western-style modernity should be, as is often claimed, the only and unavoidable destiny of all societies. They do not know why non-Western societies should be denied the right and the freedom to think for themselves and to use their talents and abilities to pursue the course that best suits their circumstances and serves their legitimate aspirations.

Furthermore, the assumption that “there is only one path of development [...] and that this is a universal model which all societies must follow,”⁹² is, as some recent critics have demonstrated, fundamentally flawed. If we were to follow this logic, as Stuart has rightly pointed out, then we should expect other societies to take the very course travelled by Western societies, that is, “tribal society would inevitably lead to nation-states, feudalism to capitalism, rural society to industrialization and so on.”⁹³ Stuart might also add that they should be allowed their share of misdemeanour in the form of at least one world war and a few decades of colonization of some poorer countries! Many analysts in the West itself have criticized this perspective which, according to Stuart, was very popular in the 1950s, especially in the works of Walter Rostow.⁹⁴ They are increasingly aware of the limitations of this line of thinking as they witness now and again “outcomes no one ever intended, which are contrary to, and often the direct opposite of, what seemed to be the dominant thrust of events.”⁹⁵

The leader of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* does not, therefore, repudiate modernity wholesale, as some writers have claimed, or favour some kind of *tabula rasa*, starting from scratch. He is fully aware, like any sensible person, of its benefits and the positive changes it has brought to human life, but what worries him most is the dark side of which only a few aspects have been raised above. Furthermore, he is not the sole person who tries to demonstrate the considerable risks to which humanity is exposed from the forces of modernity that could get out of control at any moment. "One need hardly mention the almost delirious stockpiling of thousands of nuclear warheads which, at the slightest technical or human error, could automatically lead to collective extermination."⁹⁶

Indeed, many thinkers in the West as well as elsewhere have become increasingly aware that "the more [modernity] assumes itself to be the summit of human achievement, the more its dark side appears."⁹⁷ This has been the source of much concern to many analysts and all the more so as they find that the logic of modernity is deeply contradictory. It is both "constructive and destructive: its victims are as numerous as its beneficiaries."⁹⁸ It is, this Janus-face of modernity that many Muslim thinkers, including Yassine, find troubling especially because they believe that their societies have suffered from "the destructive face" more than they have benefited from "the constructive one".

5.2.3 Towards an Islamic paradigm of modernity

Can there be an Islamic paradigm of modernity? Most, if not all Muslim thinkers would not hesitate to give the answer in the affirmative. For this reason Yassine calls for the establishment of a new model rooted in the Muslim land and culture, but open to learning from others' successful experiences. Europeans have pursued their own road to effect their transition from the Middle Ages and there should be no reason for apology if Muslim societies embark on a different road, if need be, to get out their present predicament. Aware of what this approach may entail, Yassine speaks about the need for hard work and perseverance to foster gradually the emergence of a system that he qualifies as "friendly to man and environment."⁹⁹ He writes:

We will slowly have to adapt social practices of the jungle by softening them, progressively humanizing them, taming the savage brutality of globalization intent on destroying the biosphere and keeping four-fifths of humanity destitute so that a minority might wallow in luxury and strut in their joyless opulence and bovine consuming.¹⁰⁰

Some critics find that the ideas of Yassine and his like-minded contemporaries are rather unrealistic in this respect, but Yassine has repeatedly asserted that historical logic is on the side of Muslim world. His intention, however, is not to engage in a fierce contest or a competition with a modernity which, in his view, unless drastic remedial work is undertaken, seems to be heading on a slippery slope. His intention is to persuade proponents of Western-style modernity to refrain from thinking in black-and-white terms and accept that there can exist other alternatives and not only a single one. Here Yassine meets with many recent writers who have started to challenge the classical vision of modernity and to use instead the notion of “multiple modernities”.¹⁰¹ The question that arises here is: how does Yassine envisage the emergence of a new Islamic model? The answer may be summarized in the following points:

First, he states that the goal of the voices he represents is not to emulate but learn intelligently from the Western model and gradually construct their own; and to achieve this, they would seek to acquire the scientific and technological means and adapt them to their societal and individual end-goals which are justice and spirituality, respectively. This is one of the major implications of what he calls in French “islamiser la modernité”, that is, making modernity Islamic or building an Islamic modernity.

Second, he points out that he is aware that some Westerners will be tempted to sow obstacles in their way and try to abort their plans. That would only confirm that the culture of distrust and rejection with regard to former colonized peoples is still alive but would not alter the course of the thrust of events: the voice of Islam is being discovered and the answers it offers to resolve existential crucial questions and to satisfy basic human needs are increasingly appreciated and heeded.

Third, another great mistake that Western governments should give up is that they stop supporting corrupt rulers because stability in the region cannot be achieved “by betting on the losing horse in the short or mid-term.”¹⁰² Here Yassine is obviously addressing a message to Southern Europe and France and Spain in particular. He maintains that the great disservice Southern Europe could render to European Union would be to keep its unconditional support to a corrupt political class in North African countries.

Fourth, he considers it “an insult to the future and a misreading of the present to buy into xenophobia”¹⁰³ and to continue to spread the image that Islamists are terrorists, enemy of the West, of human rights, democracy, etc. It is an insult to human intelligence, he stresses, to accuse modern Islamist movements of atrocities committed by masked bands¹⁰⁴ or to blame them for stupid crimes carried out by a handful of persons who, out of frustration and despair or because they have not had the opportunity to receive the required education to know how to cope with the injustices they may have suffered, have engaged in meaningless violence.

Fifth, he considers it in the interests of Europe that people in Morocco as well as in other North African countries should be allowed, if not aided, to build healthy modern societies on their terms. “The European Union,” he argues, “cannot fly unless the wing of this side of the Mediterranean is healthy and in working order.”¹⁰⁵ It is for this and other historical and ethical reasons that Europe should assume its responsibility and engage in a sincere reappraisal of its policy towards the only credible political force –for the time being at least– in the Arab World; it should not be mistaken as to who the future interlocutor will be. Yassine does not deny that there are some historical, social and political problems that need to be tackled, but he believes that “reciprocal recognition and mutual respect will iron out difficulties and permit a fruitful exchange, with dignity and with the interests of each guaranteed.”¹⁰⁶ He does not exclude other options or other partners to secure the needs of his country; nonetheless, he thinks that “it is inconceivable that we should seek to satisfy our need of modernization and development from far away regions

so long as Europe [...] is within calling distance.”¹⁰⁷ The underlying message is that it is up to European governments to decide; the ball is in their court.

Finally, he calls on European scholars, academics and thinkers whom he believes are in a better position to read the situation well to alert decision-makers of the gross error they would incur if they succumbed to “short-sighted pragmatism”. It seems that the same mistakes are being made again and again, and this means, in Yassine’s view, that the lesson from the downfall of the Shah of Iran “has been too quickly forgotten or not noted at all.”¹⁰⁸ European decision-makers, he implies, should be cautious not to listen to those who tell them what they like to hear but to those who tell them what they should hear.¹⁰⁹

Such were the reasons and the conditions deemed crucial for the establishment of a new form of modernity that shuns the obnoxious aspects which Yassine, like many critics in the West, has vehemently criticised and for taking a path of development which may benefit from other experiences, but is not necessarily identical to the one pursued by Western societies. One thing for sure is that this vision means that *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* will be facing a double challenge: how to turn what has been put on paper into tangible reality and in the meantime what are the chances for the new suggested model not to produce its own “dark side”?

5.3 *Al-Adl wal-Ihsan* and the status of women

“The most perfect of the believers in faith are the best of them in moral excellence, and the best of you are the kindest to their wives.”¹¹⁰

Prophet Muhammad

On 12th March 2000 Moroccan Islamists staged a huge demonstration, the largest since Morocco’s independence in 1956, gathering more than two million marchers in Casablanca.¹¹¹ The reason for this massive rally is that Said Saadi, then Secretary of State for Childhood and Family Issues, proposed what he called “a national plan” to improve the situation of Moroccan women and facilitate their integration in development. Said Saadi, member of the former communist Party for Progress and Socialism, was not, in the view of Moroccan Islamists and

conservatives in general, to be trusted with a project of such importance. Furthermore, the proposed plan, suspected of being dictated by some international organizations, is believed to contain provisions violating established Islamic principles. Hence, it was vehemently opposed and eventually withdrawn, but the implications of the event did not stop there. Given their decisive role to make the government reconsider the plan, Islamist groups, and particularly *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, were claimed to have provided irrefutable proof, in theory as well as in practice, that they were against the liberation of women and “confirmed enemies” of their rights.

It is interesting to note, however, that although at least half the demonstrators who marched in Casablanca against the government plan were women and led by highly educated women, that did not seem to prompt some writers to pause for a while before they could dismiss the demonstrators in Casa as “an obscurantist horde of Moroccan Taliban,”¹¹² Does it make sense that those women, many of whom were highly qualified,¹¹³ came to rally to tell the government in the clearest way possible that they liked to continue to suffer and that they did not need any social, political or legal rights? Is it conceivable that they demonstrated because they did not care if they were brutishly mistreated or if their husbands took four wives or as many concubines as they liked to revive, if they wished, *the harem* still flourishing, albeit under different forms, in the shadow of some rulers? Could it be that they went out to express their joy and satisfaction with an expanding network trading in what is sometimes referred to as “human flesh” or “white slavery”, sexually exploiting teenage girls living in abject poverty, deprivation, and with no education or skills?

Such questions, simple and self-evident, though, seemed to have escaped the attention of some writers who were quick to denounce the March 2000 demonstration in Casablanca as a move taken by the “Moroccan Talibans” to abort a valuable opportunity to usher in a new era for women. This section, however, would not dwell much on a single event despite its importance, but would rather use it as a springboard to consider the issue in its entirety, that is the position of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* and its leader on what is often referred to as “the question of

woman". But before we do so, a bit of history is in order to help us clarify the situation and identify the real issue.

5.3.1 Brief historical overview

When Islam first emerged in the pagan Arabian society, women were subjugated to all forms of injustice one could think of. They were treated like property to be kept or disposed of as the male guardian saw fit. They were not allowed to inherit or to choose their partners and not even to give their consent to being married. It was the father, the brother or a male relative who decided their fate the way he wished. They were exposed to various kinds of humiliation, but the inhumanity reached its climax when the birth of a female child was considered an evil omen and consequently many were buried alive.

With the advent of Islam, the situation changed completely. All the humiliating practices and customs from which women were suffering were abolished, and Muslims were instructed to treat women with dignity and respect without any discrimination or prejudice whatsoever. One of the oft-quoted sayings of the Prophet which is considered definitive in establishing the fundamental principle of male-female equality is: "O people! Your God is one and your forefather (Adam) is one. There is no claim of merit of an Arab over a non-Arab, or a white over a black person. Only God-fearing people merit a preference with God."¹¹⁴ It is no wonder that women played an important role in the first Muslim community. The Prophet's wife, Khadija, a successful businesswoman, was the first to embrace Islam and support the Prophet in his mission; and the first person to get martyred for the cause of Islam was also a woman called Sumayyah bint Khayyat. 'Aisha, whom the Prophet married after the death of his first wife, Khadija, was another outstanding woman who took part in numerous events and excelled in knowledge to the extent that one prominent Companion of the Prophet said: "I did not see a greater scholar than 'Aisha in the learning of the Quran, shares of inheritance, lawful and unlawful matters, poetry and literature, Arab history and genealogy."¹¹⁵

However, the numerous rights and provisions which came into being with the coming of Islam and accorded women the dignified, honourable status to which every human being, male or female, is entitled were not maintained in practice for long. A few decades after the death of the Prophet the early signs of decline with regard to women's condition began to permeate, albeit gradually, the Muslim society and some un-Islamic traditions started to encroach upon a number of women's rights. Though it can be argued that throughout Islamic history there are many women who have been successful in various fields and have been able to achieve remarkable accomplishments, the prevalent picture to this day is far from satisfactory, to say the least.

The question that arises is why the thrust triggered by the emergence of Islam lost its initial *élan*. In other words, what hastened the deterioration of women's condition in the Muslim world? This question has been debated by many historians and writers and a vast literature has been produced to identify the factors responsible for Muslim decline in general and the worsening situation of women in particular. It is thus difficult to do justice to this question by surveying what has been written on the subject within this small section. However, one woman writer called 'Aisha Bewly will be cited here. She is an American convert who is considered today one of the most prolific translators of classical Arabic works. In her view the decadence is due to several internal and external reasons which could be summarized as follows:

1. a re-assertion of pre-Islamic patriarchy;
2. the adoption of the pre-Islamic practices of conquered peoples (Byzantine, Persian and Hindu). For instance the adoption of the Byzantium gynaeceum which became the Ottoman harem;
3. the infiltration of Western ideas, including the view of women as inferior (which was the Western position on women until fairly recent times);
4. an active policy on the part of the colonialists to keep women down;
5. a legacy of colonialism: that Islam is "barbaric" while European, Western customs and traditions are civilized. This is reinforced by the ruling elites who inherited the mantle of colonial power [...].¹¹⁶

If some writers like Bewly maintain that it is only in the last three hundred years that the decline set in, the leader of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* argues that it started much earlier. He believes that its sour seeds were sown the moment the first Islamic

system of rule, called *Khilafah ar-Rashida*, was toppled and replaced by an oppressive, hereditary monarchy in clear violation of the Islamic principles. Since then Muslim history took a wrong trajectory and the empowering community established by the Prophet and maintained by his four successors suffered a serious blow the dire consequences of which are still reverberating in all Muslim societies to this day. For Yassine the status of women cannot be dissociated from the condition of Muslims as a whole. He explains:

The decline in the status of the Muslim women is part of the general decline of all Muslims. The decline started with the destructive transformation of the Islamic political system from a caliphate on the Prophetic model into an oppressive hereditary monarchy [...]. Thus the woman was gradually turned into a commodity, a slave-servant in palaces and a neglected object.¹¹⁷

There is yet another factor which, in the view of Yassine despite being a consequence of the anchoring of political illegitimacy, has also adversely affected the situation of women in the Islamic world. It is often referred to in his writings as “the rigid jurisprudence”, that is, the interpretations produced in various historical circumstances by some jurists which tended to be rigid in matters concerning women, especially after the alleged closure of the gate of *ijtihad* in the fourth century of the Muslim calendar. These interpretations which acquired with the passage of time a certain degree of sacredness, as if they were part of definitive Islamic principles, coupled with alien cultural customs, have hampered greatly both sexes, but women particularly, from developing their full potential and participating in the advancement of their society.

5.3.2 A roadmap to empowerment

While there is general agreement on the need to reconsider the condition of Muslim women in order to overcome the unfortunate situation in which local masculine injustice and backward traditions have placed them, views seem to differ on how to achieve that goal. Broadly speaking, these views may be classified into two competing tendencies. One is upheld by proponents of the secular trend in general. It is simple, clear and backed by a living modern reality: Westernization or the Western model is the solution. The rationale behind such a view is that religion

is seen as the problem and that it is only when it was discarded and marginalized in the West that the condition of women improved. Therefore, the same path should be followed to achieve the same results. One prominent Egyptian author went as far as to write a few decades ago that Arab countries should emulate the West in everything, “in its good and its bad, its sweet and its bitter!”¹¹⁸ This may sound exaggerated, but this is the core of the secular liberal proposal, though there may be those who would prefer less extreme arrangements.

This position for the advocates of the other competing view, the Islamists in general, is neither justified nor realistic despite claims to the contrary. It is not justified because it is based on wrong assumptions. If women suffered in the Christian world because of the negative position the Church entertained against them for a long time, this is not the case with Islam as we have briefly seen above. It is only when Islamic principles were overlooked that women’s condition started to deteriorate. And it is not realistic because “to copy” a model developed in a certain cultural and civilizational context and “paste” it in a completely different setting is doomed to fail, however appealing it might be. As a matter of fact, the secular project has already lost much of its apparent glamour and people in the Arab world seem to appreciate increasingly their Islamic heritage. It is no wonder that nowadays whenever fair and transparent elections are held, it is the Islamic parties that hold considerable sway.

Such being the case, the view to which mainstream Islamist groups, including *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, subscribe is claimed to be more appropriate and viable. It rests, it is argued, on a model that did take place more than 14 centuries ago, and the principles and provisions that led to its emergence are still valid and alive and need only be re-activated. It is a model with which the crushing majority of Muslims feel more at home and trust it would provide an enabling environment where justice prevails and a decent life is secured for all. It happened in the first Islamic community established by the Prophet and continued with his four successors and there is no reason why it should not materialize again if the required conditions are met. This raises the question about those conditions and how they could be satisfied, and this is indeed where Islamists’ views seem to differ.

For *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, “to deliver the contemporary Muslim woman and draw her from the abyss of injustice and negligence where she languishes,”¹¹⁹ there must be a comprehensive view in order to identify the root problem and know how to cope with it effectively. What is needed at this stage is not the laws which exist already and many more may be enacted, if necessary, to improve the situation of women, but rather the suitable political environment which makes reform possible and sure to bear fruit.

To defend their position members of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* refer to several initiatives taken by the Moroccan government and the recent one being the New Family Code which was introduced in January 2004. They argue that almost nine years have already elapsed and yet the results are far from being encouraging. It is enough, they contend, to pay a short visit to any Moroccan court or hospital where some ladies have delivered outside on the pavement in front of strangers because they have been kept waiting or even denied entry because they have not had the required sum of money to be admitted, or to go to some companies and factories where women and girls are employed ... to have an idea about the misery and humiliation which women are still being subjected to. This is why *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* never trusts the initiatives taken by the present regime because it believes that it cares neither about men nor about women and the issue of women has been used as a mere ploy to circumvent the real problem which, in the view of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, lies first and foremost in an archaic system of rule infested with corruption to the core.¹²⁰

Consequently, to improve the condition of women requires a comprehensive package of reforms targeting both government and society, an adequate approach and genuine political will which, according to *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, is still missing. Women, therefore, should make no mistake about it; they should know that the road to real change is long and arduous, but it is crucial to get involved, “since everything has its beginning and the greatest marathon departs from point zero.”¹²¹ It is not enough, maintains Yassine, that the Muslim woman just knows the rights that true Islam grants her; “she should be able to reclaim their application.”¹²² She should not wait for others to do the job for her. No one, argues Yassine, is in a

better position than her to bring hope to “the rest of female population [who] vegetates in ignorance, not daring to imagine the least bit of change.”¹²³

Does Yassine mean that men and women should not cooperate and that women should work on their own to restore the confiscated rights and bring about the required change? Definitely not; he merely intends to emphasize that women’s participation is crucial in the efforts to liberate society from the shackles of backward customs and practices which have accrued over a long period of time and hindered Muslim women from realising their full potential. He also seeks to encourage competition in good work and to stress that there is no harm that there should be various associations rivalling one another in raising the awareness of their people, male and female alike.

It is also important, in the view of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, to overcome not only the alien, demeaning traditions which have been wrongly tacked on Islam, but also the juristic interpretations and *fatwas* which were produced in different historical circumstances and tended to place unwarranted restrictions on women, disregarding the Islamic principles and the practices of the Prophet himself. As it has been pointed out earlier, at the time of the Prophet women participated actively in the establishment of the first community and got involved in activities some of which cannot be claimed to be easy or safe like battles, though in certain cases they were not compelled to do so. They were also present in discussions about faith or other important issues, and in order to catch up with men, the Prophet went as far as to devote extra sessions to instruct them and answer their questions. When some women expressed their concern that the Quran seemed to address men only, divine response came immediately afterwards to reassure them that was not the case and that the Quran addresses both sexes, men and women alike.¹²⁴ Thus, women felt empowered and were indeed able to play their undeniable important role in society. It is because of this new liberating understanding of the status of women in Islam that Umar, the second Caliph, did not hesitate to appoint a woman, ash-Shifa bint AbduAllah, as the administrator [*Muhtasib*] of the market of Madinah, a job which entailed not only working outside the home but also interacting with men and women¹²⁵.

The leaders of *Al-Adl wal-Ihsan* have repeatedly emphasized that they refuse to be dragged into what they describe as “marginal struggles” over matters of less importance or which do not constitute priorities such dress codes, the issue of women’s work outside the home, polygamy which, apart from very rare cases, has almost disappeared from today’s Moroccan society and the like. They think that such issues no matter whoever bring them to the fore and whatever his or her intention only serve to distract the public’s attention away from the more serious ills that plague Moroccan society as a result of a long history of tyranny, mismanagement and failed policies. This is why, it is claimed, they did not want initially to get involved in the debate about *Muduwwana* [code of personal status] and the so-called government plan to integrate women into development we have referred to above. It is only when the issue was politicized and some secular strands decided to take the matter to the streets that the movement responded “to send a clear message to all those who sought to further alienate the Moroccan society from its Islamic roots and values.”¹²⁶ Otherwise, the policy of the movement is to focus on what it considers the major sources of the prevailing socio-political and economic crises, i.e. authoritarianism and corruption and more importantly on the ways and means that help create the conditions for change.

To combine theory with practice, the movement has tried from the beginning to encourage women to get engaged in organized activism and it seems that it has been successful in this respect, since at least half of its members are now female.¹²⁷ However, the task, according to members of the movement, was no small or easy one at the beginning not only because of the deeply entrenched traditions but also of the risks incurred in joining an organization under constant harassment since it came into existence. Even when female members started to join the movement, it was not easy either to bring them together to organize a common event. Now many events are commonly planned and carried out, though women may still want to organize their own activities for one reason or another.¹²⁸

Women are also well represented in the governing bodies of the movement and according to some senior members, *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* compares favourably with many Islamic groups inside as well as outside Morocco.¹²⁹ It is true that the bodies

and committees of the movement are not all mixed-gender and that, as we have seen in Chapter three, there is a section for men and another for women, but this does not mean that there is a clear divide between the two sections. There are mixed-gender committees at every level of the hierarchy to ensure coordination and cooperation. As for the political section which is one of the major components of the movement, it comprises female and male members at all levels.

Like men, women are also encouraged to be present wherever they could contribute significantly to spreading the message and what is believed to be an enlightened understanding of Islam and raising the awareness of people using various means: audio and videotapes, booklets, speeches, lectures, internet, social gatherings, etc. This is in keeping with the overall strategy of the movement which focuses specifically “on a long-term grassroots project”¹³⁰ and direct contact with people. It is what is termed “*le travail de fond*” [substantive field work] that is required in the view of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* to bring the bulk of female population from afar and help them to get involved whatever the degree of engagement might be. The aim is not necessarily to win over new members to the movement but rather to make them aware of their dignity and to open new horizons for them, stressing the value and importance of their contribution. This is the policy that the movement has opted for and seeks to undertake today, tomorrow and ever: to stay connected with people, work with them and amongst them.¹³¹ And this is what they apparently mean when senior members of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* say that politics is one of their concerns but not all that matters. In fact, in Yassine’s view even in the case an Islamic government is established, it “can only clear the road and smooth the difficulties: what is required is the joint effort of men and women to take to the field and act, to invest themselves and to persevere.”¹³² Only then can the aspired change be reached.

5.4 Conclusion

Despite a substantial amount of writing produced by *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* and particularly its leader covering a wide range of topics, the attitude of the movement towards democracy, modernity and the status of women is still poorly understood

and in certain cases it could be said that it is even distorted. The position of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* on these or on any other issues is said to be inspired by an Islamic vision and as such it is no wonder that it should differ slightly or significantly from other positions informed by different worldviews. In fact, *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* challenges the view which maintains that the only values that should be invoked and respected are those of the Enlightenment philosophy and that those who adhere to revelation, tradition or any mode of thinking should be dismissed and cannot be said to be, in any significant way, engaged in promoting the development of modern society in their countries. *Al-Adl wal-Ihsan* finds such a view arbitrary and exclusivist. There is no reason in its view that the parameters and boundaries of the field of discussion of topics like the ones raised above should be formulated in an absolute dichotomised way: “You’re either for or against.” Neither does it find it convincing that a certain worldview should set the standards and expect the rest to unquestioningly acquiesce. *Al-Adl wal-Ihsan* stands for the view that Muslim societies should have the right to define their discourse and apply their own criteria to deal with issues like the ones discussed in this chapter.

Thus if *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* cannot be said to subscribe totally to the notion of democracy as it is understood by some Westerners, it would be unfair to claim that it stands on the opposite shore, that is, favouring autocracy, theocracy or any other form of tyranny, whatever its shape and hue, religious or otherwise, that confiscates people’s freedom and denies them the right to have a genuine say in their own affairs and to choose their representatives and rulers in free and fair elections. *Al-Adl wal-Ihsan* stands for a form of government that should be the outcome of free public debate and accountable to people. As it finds that its view converges with democracy on many crucial points, it sees no reason why it should quarrel with it, as long as democracy is not hostile to Islam and does not get mad at the sight of a small piece of cloth that some girls choose, of their own volition and for religious reasons, to put on their heads. *Al-Adl wal-Ihsan* denies allegations that its attitude to democracy is tactical or one-way process to be endorsed only if it is sure to establish Islam in power, or, as some critics sarcastically put it, it is “one

vote, one man, one time”. Besides being considered unfounded, such claims are impossible to undertake nowadays. It seems that the international environment, for various practical reasons, no longer condones usurpation of power in any country, and *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* is not willing or anxious to take a course of action which it rejects on principle and not just because it is doomed to fail.

One rule that informs the behaviour and attitude of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* towards democracy, modernity or any other issue for that matter is that anything that is beneficial and does not contravene established and conclusive Islamic principles is not just acceptable but should be sought and adopted. This is why though Yassine seems to be very critical of what is called the “dark side” of modernity, it does not mean that he rejects it wholesale and disregards its positive achievements. Furthermore, many of his criticisms, admittedly harsh, often overlap or confirm those voiced by Western critics themselves; and if these cannot be accused of advocating a return to the Dark Ages, the same should also apply to Yassine and his group. By criticizing what some analysts describe as “the destructive aspects” of modernity, he does not intend to defend the status quo or seek to return “to a presumed golden age of tents and camels”. Yet Yassine believes that there is no reason for apology if Muslim societies take a different road to development and devise their own model of modernity. The world, it is argued, despite agreed common values, is plural and diverse and it is neither required nor possible to try to make “a melting pot” of what is by nature and definition “unmeltable”.

This line of thinking also applies to what *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* proposes for the liberation of the contemporary Muslim woman. It is a model that draws on Islam on the grounds that the latter grants her rights that women in the West were denied until very recently. That some Westerners or Westernized elite in Morocco or elsewhere may not partly or totally appreciate it, is quite normal because they are using their own standards. However, what *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* intends to stress is that there are other standards derived from another worldview to which more than a billion Muslims subscribe that should also count and be understood and respected. If some women feel that a certain vision ensures dignity, justice, social harmony and the well-being of all and decide to support it, are they to blame? The issue is

not even to compare between models and claim supremacy of one over the others, but the real issue for *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* is that the last word should be left to the Muslim woman herself; and when she makes her choice, she should be respected.

This seems to be the vision that underpins the behaviour and attitude of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* towards the issues we have discussed in this chapter as well as others which, for reasons of space, could not have been raised. It is based on the movement's understanding of Islamic teachings and the Muslim history, an analysis of the realities of contemporary Muslim societies and the changing modern world and on a type of *ijtihad* some aspects of which have been discussed in the previous chapter. It is this vision that seems to account for the type of activism that the movement has chosen to build up a force able to press for change as we have seen in chapter two and three, that appear to account for the approach taken to tackle a number of Islamic issues as it has been discussed in chapter four and also for the nature of strategy advocated by *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* to reform society and government as we will see in more detail later on, after exploring two major reform strategies pursued so far in Morocco in the following chapter.

Chapter 6 Revolutionary and “Democratic Struggle” Strategies in Morocco and their Outcomes

A classical question which seems unavoidable to those who happen to be still living under repressive regimes is how to put an end to an abnormal situation and replace a system of rule whereby the people can be free to choose their rulers and representatives and their choice be respected and implemented. The answers have differed depending on the circumstances of each country and the forces engaged to find a solution to their predicament. There are those who seek a way out whatever the sacrifices and the sooner, the better. Others, however, are keen to overcome their problem in a more sober and rational way and try to formulate an effective strategy to bring down authoritarianism to lay to rest once and for all with the least cost.

In Morocco the same sort of debate has occurred with some differences in details of course. In the pre-colonial era the dominant question was how to throw off the yoke of colonialism and recover independence. In post-colonial Morocco, a different question soon started to take shape and acquire significance, especially when the late king Hassan II showed that he favoured to rule alone, unimpeded. Since the consequences of such an option began to be felt acutely in the country, the issue of prime concern for some political forces was how to curb if not to eradicate the emerging despotic rule and provide the conditions for the people to have a genuine say in the affairs of their country. Two broad visions were, at the beginning, discernible. One preferred to negotiate reform with the Palace and the other believed in revolution and even the necessity of arms. The irony is that neither those who sought change through violent means nor those who had faith in working from within the system to change it succeeded. What may account for such failure?

This chapter examines these two trajectories. The first section focuses on what is referred to as “the revolutionary option” and tries to find out about the reasons

behind its emergence, its basic characteristics and why it did not work. The second is devoted to the study of “the democratic struggle” represented by *L’Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires* (USFP) [Socialist Union of Popular Forces], one of the major national political parties in Morocco, and see why its choice, like the revolutionary option, failed to yield any significant results. Is it due to any perceived flaws in the pursued approaches or to the resilience of a system in which the monarchy continues to retain all the levers of power and dominate the political scene, or to any other factors?

6.1 Revolutionary option in Morocco

“The revolutionary option”, refers to a strategy designed by the famous opposition leader, Mehdi Ben Barka, in an attempt to resolve the question of power in Morocco and create the conditions for sustainable comprehensive development. It is claimed to be based on an in-depth analysis of the prevailing socio-political situation in the country and an objective evaluation of the conditions of independence. In this section we will examine, as it has been pointed out, the context in which it emerged, the reasons advanced for considering it as a viable course of action and why it did not manage to achieve the intended results.

6.1.1 Rationale

When Morocco regained its formal independence in 1956 after nearly half a century of colonialism, the euphoria caused by the event was only increased by the wild promises made soon afterwards. Upon his return from exile, Mohammad V pledged in his first speech that an independent government would set up “democratic institutions that were the product of free elections, and founded on the principle of the separation of powers under a constitutional monarchy.”¹ What some nationalists understood or expected at the time was that the king would not get involved in political struggle and that he would “adopt at best the role of an arbitrator or mediator or even a symbol.”² It soon became clear, however, that the monarch did not mean that and he intended to reign and rule, though he would not mind the participation of other political groups in the management of the affairs of

the state as long as the monarchy is ensured a dominant position within the political scene. This intention was translated into a number of practical measures. The most urgent one was to set up the police and the armed forces and make sure that they were maintained under the king's direct control;³ a second one which is equally important was to keep key ministries and posts to his loyal friends whereas the rest, which could be filled by other politicians, would serve other important purposes.⁴

For an outstanding political figure, like Ben Barka, he could not have misunderstood the nature of the political system that was being built, and he once spoke about his concern to an American journalist, telling her that King Mohammad V no longer seemed to trust the Istiqlal Party and "he attributed this change to the influence of Prince Hassan."⁵ When the latter took office upon his father's death in 1961 and the government headed by Abdellah Ibrahim was dismissed, Ben Barka lost all hope to introduce the reforms that he and his comrades thought necessary to establish what they believed to be "a new and just order."⁶ In a report which he initially intended to present to the second congress of the National Union of Popular Forces [UNFP] in May 1962,⁷ a party which he had formed in 1959 after breaking away from the Istiqlal Party, Ben Barka explains in detail how he came to that conclusion and what he suggests to relieve Morocco of what he describes as "an absolute and archaic regime."⁸

In this report, which makes the major part of a publication under the title *The Political Thought of Ben Barka: I. Revolutionary Option in Morocco*, the leftist leader repeatedly asserts that the country is "under a regime of repression and absolute power,"⁹ and it is no wonder that all the initiatives and projects presumably taken to improve the condition of the Moroccan people have failed. The social and political policies failed because they did not appeal to those concerned or because they tended to serve the privileged minority and neocolonialist interests, and the constitutional organization failed because it provided the ruler with absolute power. This is not, affirms Ben Barka, what the people expected after all the sacrifices they had made to put an end to the colonial rule, nor does it conform to the promises given in the first days of independence.

Failed policies, unfulfilled promises and the growing misery of the people have only widened even further the gap between them and the rulers, and consequently the regime now seems to be more fragile than ever.

If the situation is as described by Ben Barka, then how can we explain the survival of the monarchy despite the serious attempts made to curtail its powers if not to get rid of it altogether? In the view of Ben Barka, there are a number of reasons. One obvious one lies in the monopoly of the levers of power and force, the police and the army. This explains why in the wake of independence the establishment of the security forces, as mentioned above, was given utmost priority and has since then been considered the royal "private domains"¹⁰. However, this source of support, notes Ben Barka, may not always be reliable; in fact, it may even become a serious threat.¹¹ Here Ben Barka seems remarkably right: so far at least twice has the military tried to overthrow the monarchy and, according to some observers, future attempts are not to be ruled out despite the failure of the previous ones. The reason that is usually referred to in this respect is that nobody is spared humiliation, whatever their position might be, and stories to this effect are too numerous to be dismissed as mere gossip.¹²

Another major source of support, explains Ben Barka, comes from abroad in the form of financial aid, intelligence information and sophisticated security equipment, arms, training etc. These services are, of course, not offered for free, but to empower the regime to protect the interests of what Ben Barka calls "the imperialist and neocolonialist forces."¹³ It may be argued, however, that the palace does have its reasons to be suspicious and even scared. The early 1960s was not a rosy period for Arab monarchs. In Jordan King Abdullah was killed in 1951; in Egypt King Faruk was toppled in 1952; in Iraq King Faisal was assassinated; and in Tunisia, Bourgiba put an end to the dynasty of Beys in 1957.¹⁴ These events must have had their impact on the Moroccan monarchy to be sceptical towards the internal political groups and to be disposed to cooperate or even collaborate with some foreign powers. But in Ben Barka's view these countries may not continue to back a bankrupt regime permanently. They may be brought to switch positions if they feel that the alternative socialist construction does not necessarily entail

severing “the relations of cooperation and exchange with advanced capitalist economies”, an idea which Ben Barka does not reject provided it is established “on the basis of strict reciprocity.”¹⁵

A third pillar which the regime relies on represents a group of high and middle officials who are, according to Ben Barka, “literally bought by privileges.”¹⁶ The basic flaw of this system is that loyalty takes precedence over competence and as a result the administration has become notoriously inefficient and corrupt. The petty functionaries try to imitate their superiors who, through bribery, make scandalous fortunes in a very short time. Worst of all is that nothing, under the prevailing circumstances, seems possible to remedy a rotten administrative organ whose efficiency is considered vital for a country’s development.

These are the main sources of support for the regime. Nevertheless, if these elements have helped it to survive on one hand, they have on the other hand eroded its social base to a great extent and thus increased its isolation further and exacerbated its vulnerability. Furthermore, nothing can guarantee, as we have seen, that the endorsement drawn from these sources is reliable or permanent.

The other aspect dealt with in the report prepared by Ben Barka concerns the social condition in Morocco. It is in his view no better off than the political situation. In fact, he believes that the contradictions have become so evident that one can safely devise a viable strategy to undertake the required social and political change, which is what he has been trying to do in this document. Broadly speaking, four social sectors are quite discernable in the Moroccan society and according to Ben Barka they are as follows:

1. a big bourgeoisie that has abdicated its political aspirations and allied itself to semi-feudal interests;
2. a working class which is the prime revolutionary force and which must define clearly its trade union tasks and political aims;
3. a discontented small and medium bourgeoisie potentially revolutionary, but which hesitates to renew the struggle for its national liberation;
4. a peasant mass of small landless *fellahs de khemmes* who need a clear vision of their tasks and a framework within which to organize their own unity with the working class.¹⁷

The analysis of the social as well as the political circumstances in Morocco has led Ben Barka to draw two important conclusions: the first is that the situation inside and outside Morocco is suitable for what he calls the progressive forces to assume their responsibility and take what is necessary to bring about the change that the country is need of; the second is that the revolutionary option is the only viable way to achieve such an objective. Meanwhile, he believes that some conditions must be met to be sure of success.

6.1.2 Conditions for success

Two conditions are of prime importance: self-criticism and ideological clarity. With regard to the former, Ben Barka thinks that the Nationalist Movement committed three fatal errors between 1956 and 1960 and they must not be repeated in order for the revolutionary option to succeed. The first relates to the evaluation of the compromises that the leaders of the Nationalist Liberation Movement had to make with the colonizers when they accepted the Aix-les-Bains agreement.¹⁸ For Ben Barka it was a pure trap because it was concluded at the very moment when the political awareness of the people was gathering momentum in scope as well as in depth and when the unity of the anti-colonial struggle among the people of the Great Maghreb was taking shape and root. The colonial powers understood the trends of events better than the nationalists, argues Ben Barka, and hastened to strike an agreement which prima facie seemed a victory for Morocco but in reality it was the surest way to secure the colonialists' interests and maintain their influence after the country's formal independence. What is even more regrettable, notes Ben Barka, is that the compromise of Aix-les-Bains was adopted completely and presented to the public as an outright defeat of French colonialism. It was not, affirms Ben Barka; "it was only a deceptive and wisely-calculated concession."¹⁹ One of its dire consequences is that the revolutionary élan of the people was cooled down and the vision of the militants was blurred when the real objective of the struggle was reduced to the mere return of a sultan from exile.²⁰ The overwhelming impression was that the battle was over and that the goal had been achieved.

The second fundamental error is that between 1956 and 1960 many battles were fought behind closed doors, in the villas of the leaders of the Istiqlal Party or behind the high walls of the royal palace, but the people knew nothing about what was going on. They knew nothing about the struggle in which the nationalists engaged to make all levers of powers, including the army, the police and the constabulary, under the orders of the government in order for the latter to have the means of applying its tasks, but it was all in vain. People had no idea either about the battles that Abderrahim Bouabid, Ben Barka's comrade, had to fight to implement even the minimal economic reforms, nor did they know anything about the efforts they had made in order for the "list ballot" to be used in the district elections, but without any success. It was the other type of ballot, the uninominal, that the king and his advisers preferred for obvious reasons that was adopted in spite of the fact that the majority of political groups were against it.²¹

Ben Barka also refers to the in-fighting they had within the Executive Committee and the Political Commission of the Istiqlal Party about a number of issues, particularly the question of the Resistance and Liberation Army and the Moroccan Labour Union, and deplors how the position of some leaders was far from being ethically acceptable, to say the least. Ben Barka believes that if the people had been informed about all these issues and the bitter struggles they entailed at the time, they would have been spared lots of time, pain and frustration.²²

The third serious error incurred by the leaders of the Nationalist Movement was related to the vagueness of their political position. They did not explain clearly what they stood for and what their objectives and priorities were. The pressing issue was that of independence and the clarification of preferences or differences was not considered a priority. The result is that when independence was recovered, there was no agreed, clear idea about the kind of economic, social and political organization to be adopted in Morocco.²³ If the aims and priorities, implies Ben Barka, had been clearly defined, the chances of an absolute regime getting established in the wake of independence would have been very bleak.

Such errors, concludes Ben Barka, have had grave consequences, and to avoid repeating them in the future, he insists on the practice of self-criticism and on transparency. No engagement should be made without explaining in full to the public what it truly entails and if any compromise were to be accepted, its gains as well as its losses should be clarified and not be presented as a total victory for any reason whatsoever.

The second condition for the revolutionary strategy to succeed is that the aims should be not only well defined but also well understood. This is what seems to be implied by the ideological clarity. In this respect, Ben Barka makes a distinction between what he describes as long-term and short-term objectives. This distinction is, in his view, important because it helps to know where a certain degree of flexibility is permitted, if not even required, and where it is not. Concerning the long-term objectives of the revolutionary path, Ben Barka declares that they are based on true scientific socialism which, according to him, is characterized by the following:

1. the correct solution of the problem of power, that is the establishment of political institutions which will permit the democratic control of the masses over the state apparatus as well as the distribution of resources and the national product;
2. an economic structure that will uproot the bases of imperialist domination, an ally of feudalism and the parasitical big bourgeoisie;
3. a political and social institution that will organize and educate the masses with a view to the mobilization of all national resources needed for accumulation.²⁴

What should be noted, however, is that though these objectives have been definitely established, Ben Barka admits that one cannot expect them to be achieved overnight. Therefore, a long period is needed to lay down the bases of a socialist society, and this could be realized through a number of short-term objectives which constitute what is described as “the minimum programme”²⁵ At the economic level, the key targets of “the minimum programme” are: 1) planning; 2) nationalization in the agricultural, industrial, commercial and banking sectors; and 3) an agrarian reform in order to destroy the colonial structures and create new ones suitable for accelerated development.²⁶

At the political level, Ben Barka believes that no true reform could take place within the context of an absolutist power. Hence, he insists on the democratic solution which entails, among other things, setting up genuine popular institutions and the participation of the popular masses in handling their public affairs.²⁷ In the field of foreign diplomacy, he advocates total solidarity with the international revolutionary movements in Africa, the Middle East and elsewhere, fighting for their dignity and freedom and seeking to put an end to imperialist domination. Not all anti-imperialist tasks, remarks Ben Barka, should be placed on the same level of importance, but the dialectic interaction between the internal and the external in the revolutionary strategy requires the emphasis on two key targets: “an agrarian reform at home and the creation of a united Arab Maghreb abroad.”²⁸

The question that arises now is: how to achieve these objectives, the immediate as well as the long-range ones? Though Ben Barka recognizes that it is no easy question, he, nonetheless, believes that *L'Union National des Forces Populaires* (UNFP) [National Union of Popular Forces], the party he founded in 1959, is the only tool capable of turning the aims into reality provided that three aspects are given special attention: one is related to organization; the second, to ideology; and the third, to praxis.

Concerning organization, the party should maintain in the current stage centralism and democracy within its ranks.²⁹ It should also have a new central body to be called the Central Committee whose function is “to ensure cohesion, the unity of viewpoint and thought of all party chiefs on the central and provincial levels.”³⁰ With regard to the ideological aspect, Ben Barka emphasizes that the militants should be well aware of what the revolutionary strategy entails. Hence, the necessity of intense ideological preparation in order to have the militants and the cadres able to rise to the lofty tasks they are expected to fulfill.³¹

As for the third aspect which has to do with praxis, Ben Barka notes that, apart from the exploiting classes and the allies and bulwarks of neocolonialism, the UNFP is “the party of the people” and, as such, should be expanded socially to include all social sectors and geographically all regions. To achieve this practically,

it should establish its parallel organizations including trade unions, organizations of peasants, students, professionals, women, youth and the like to cover all fields of interest. More importantly, the party, by virtue of the driving force it stands for, must play the leading role in integrating and directing the struggle of all these sectors. "In this way," concludes Ben Barka, "we can guarantee ideological unity, dynamism and the unity of all popular forces which will enable us to advance with firm steps towards our objectives."³²

6.1.3 A critical appraisal of the revolutionary option

The big question that poses itself persistently: why did a strategy so carefully crafted suffer complete failure? Why was the UNFP party unable to mobilize the masses and gather enough support to translate dreams into reality? Was it due to some deficiency in the proposed approach or in the tool of implementation or in both or to other internal or external factors? There is no easy answer to such questions, especially if we take into account the mastermind behind this revolutionary strategy. It could not be said that it was a rash or botched initiative taken by an inexperienced young politician fascinated by the Marxist tools of analysis and by the Soviet, Chinese and Cuban models of modern society. Ben Barka was of unquestionable talents. All his friends and foes acknowledge that the man was very dynamic and, as one writer has put it, "of feverish imagination, an unsurpassed energy and a keen intelligence."³³ Born in 1920, he showed early in his life that he was highly gifted and eventually he joined the University in Algiers where he graduated in mathematics. Back in Morocco, he worked as a teacher of mathematics and one of his students was Crown Prince Hassan whom he taught for six years. It is no wonder that Hassan II knew his former maths teacher well and had this to say about him: "He [Ben Barka] used to speak with passion and energy and with an intelligence that sparks from his eyes, his nose, his ears and fingers. He was kind of a formidable intellectual machine."³⁴

Ben Barka joined the Istiqlal Party since its inception in 1944 and became one of the youngest members of its Executive Committee. When Morocco recovered its independence in 1956, he was elected President of the first National Assembly. At

one moment he was considered one of the three or four powerful men in the country.³⁵ He travelled a lot and became friends with many international personalities, including presidents of some countries. Among his international tasks was the organization of the first Three Continents Conference to be held in Havana in January 1966. His dynamism and widening influence must have been a source of disturbance to the Moroccan Monarchy. Before he ascended the throne, Hassan II once told an American journalist the following: “Mehdi is too ambitious. He wants to do too many things and won’t accomplish anything important. I’m ambitious too, but I’ll settle for four or five *grands coups* in a lifetime [...]”³⁶

It is not clear whether Crown Prince meant at the time that two persons apparently cherishing, or so it seems, “the same ambition” could not live under the same roof even if it were as large as the world itself and whether one of his “four or five *grands coups*” included getting rid of a serious rival. Whatever the case might be, Ben Barka was not going to live for long after Hassan II took office in 1961. He was kidnapped in broad daylight in Paris in 1965 and was never seen again. In the view of many observers the involvement of the French secret services and Moroccan high security officials in the heinous murder of a figure of international renown seems unquestionable, but strangely enough after nearly fifty years, *l’affaire* Ben Barka, as is commonly referred to, is still an unresolved mystery.

Could the early disappearance of the socialist leader account for the failure of the revolutionary option and for the quick demise of UNFP, the party which was expected to be the instrument of implementation? As a matter of fact, various explanations, though they may overlap or complement or even contradict each other, have been put forward. For reasons of space only a few examples will be mentioned here.

According to one explanation the failure of the revolutionary option in Morocco is due to the regime’s ruthless repression.³⁷ Indeed, since the foundation of the UNFP in 1959, and more particularly after the dismissal of the government headed by the leftist leader Abdellah Ibrahim in May 1960, the UNFP Party became a target of the Moroccan authorities. A number of its members were arrested and

imprisoned for questionable reasons, and some of its influential leaders, including Ben Barka, feeling to be seriously threatened, had to go into exile. To justify the campaign against the UNFP Party, the authorities claimed to have uncovered plots to overthrow the regime and replace it by a republic.³⁸ How many of these plots were real or merely fictitious may be hard to say, but one thing for sure is that the Moroccan regime used scores of pretexts to silence or crush its opponents, which was achieved without grave consequences save the case of Ben Barka which, because of the errors incurred by the plotters, received maximum media coverage and caused a scandal particularly in France, where the abdication and assassination were carried out.³⁹ Otherwise, the Moroccan regime capitulated well on the prevailing circumstances of the cold war era and thwarted all the attempts to reform an authoritarian system on the grounds that they were meant to turn Morocco into a socialist republic.

One possible criticism of this explanation, however, is that there are other revolutionary movements in other places which have succeeded despite their having been subjected to similar or even more difficult circumstances. Indeed, in any struggle, especially if it involves power, you cannot expect your enemy to cross their hands and wait until they are done for. They will resort to whatever they have at their disposal to maintain the status quo. Thus, though repression is a factor that should not be overlooked, it alone may not account for the failure of the revolutionary option and explain the whole story satisfactorily.

Another explanation claims that the failure of the revolutionary option lies in the leadership of the UNFP party itself which was torn between two trends in terms of organization. One group favoured horizontal organizational structure which allows for few or no layers of intervention between the masses and the leadership and ensures that the militants are directly involved in the decision-making process. The other group preferred the hierarchical model whereby the chain of command is important and the decision-making rests with the top leaders. This was thought to be the best format to keep the members away from petty differences that would erupt now and again within the leadership and thereby maintain the cohesion of the party.⁴⁰ If such a conflicting view did exist within the leadership of the UNFP about

an organizational issue like this one, and if it was so acute as is claimed, then the party which was expected to lead the people along the revolutionary path was suffering from a serious flaw which might have contributed to its eventual demise.

A third explanation blames the de-politicization of the trade unions for the failure of the revolutionary option in Morocco. It is claimed that the strength of the UNFP depended largely on the powerful trade union of UMT [Union Marocaine du Travail/ Moroccan Labour Union] with which it had allied in the 1959 Istiqlal split. The political maneuvering of the palace, however, succeeded in separating between the two organizations, but the declared reason at the time was that trade unions should focus on the well-being of the working classes and not engage in politics or align with any political parties.⁴¹ Ben Barka himself alludes to this issue in his report to the second congress of UNFP and warns against the dire consequences of not including political revolutionary demands in the struggle of trade unions, stressing that the battle of the Moroccan people to relieve their country of what he describes as “an absolute and archaic regime with an inert and corrupt administration,”⁴² must not be fragmented. But the breach between UMT and UNFP seemed irreparable, and the latter, having lost a powerful ally, suffered a fatal blow which, according to this perspective, left the revolutionary project bereft of any chance of success.

A fourth explanation attributes the failure to the nature of the revolutionary option itself. It is argued that the inability of the UNFP Party to mobilize the masses around its project is basically due to its discourse, which only appealed to a limited number of people with a certain ideological preference. It did not take into consideration the nature of the society within which it was operating. The political jargon of its leaders which drew on the leftist ideologies and the use of terms such as imperialism, feudalism, neocolonialism, comprador and the like to communicate with a population the majority of which was still illiterate because of the colonial policies for nearly half a century all did not help much the UNFP Party to increase its base. Furthermore, their attitude towards religion which was considered “an impediment to progress”⁴³ and rumours that they were Communists, that they scorned Islamic symbols and that they did not fast during the month of Ramadan

are claimed to have deprived them of a crucial source of support. Many people, so goes the argument, were not encouraged to actually engage though they might appreciate some of their social and political stances.⁴⁴

Whatever the reasons behind the failure of the revolutionary option, one cannot deny that it was a serious attempt to cope with a thorny issue which, to this day, is still unresolved in Morocco. The question that persists, however, is: how to seek social and political reform if it cannot be achieved along revolutionary lines? In other words, what is the alternative? Proponents of what is called the “democratic struggle strategy” claim they have the answer. To what extent can such a claim be substantiated by the reality on the ground? This is the question to which we shall return in the following section, taking as an example the case of the USFP party.

6.2 Democratic struggle strategy

As the revolutionary strategy did not seem to work, the “democratic struggle” emerged as an option with more confidence as a viable alternative. Though variant forms may be identified with this strategy, they have all a common feature: the belief, if not the necessity, to work from within the system to achieve social and political change. It may take time, it is admitted, but the prospects of success are claimed to be high. In this section we will focus on the case of the *Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires* (USFP) [Socialist Union of Popular Forces], one of the major political parties in Morocco which enjoyed a wide popularity and was in opposition for many years before it participated in the government of *alternance* in 1998. We will see how it came to espouse what it calls the “democratic strategy” and what justifications it provided for taking a new path of struggle against an authoritarian system of rule and, more importantly, the outcome of what was vehemently defended as a carefully well-thought alternative.

6.2.1 A new party with a new trajectory

Though the new trajectory began to take shape in 1972, it did not become quite clear until January 1975 when the USFP held an extraordinary convention to finalize the new strategy it would adopt to pressure the regime to ease its grip on

power. The founding members of the new party were fully aware of the importance of the event because most, if not all of them, were former members of a party which favoured the revolutionary option. Consequently, to provide a convincing explanation for this shift in strategy and for the creation of a new party, albeit indirectly, was deemed necessary. A carefully prepared report for this event argues that the new strategy rests on a solid ideological base and an in-depth analysis of the whole situation in Morocco.

With regard to the ideological aspect, the report confirms the adherence of the USFP to socialism, regarding it as the unavoidable necessary solution of the internal contradictions lying at the heart of the capitalist system. It goes on to stress that “socialism has indeed become the only way out of the abject and inhumane situation the peoples of the three continents have been placed in by global colonialism and imperialism.”⁴⁵ The oppressed peoples of the world have become increasingly aware of this reality and for this reason, “socialism has come to mean for them at one and the same time the achievement of national independence, unity and the abolition of exploitation in all its forms.”⁴⁶

Since socialism may mean different things to different people and to dispel any possible confusion, the report states that the scientific version which the USFP advocates is characterized by two basic features. First, it refuses “to make living reality subject to preconceived, static intellectual patterns;”⁴⁷ and second, it entails the adoption of a comprehensive strategy in order to build a socialist society in line with the Moroccan specificity.⁴⁸

Then the report proceeds to identify what it considers the root causes of the prevailing miserable situation in Morocco, bringing underdevelopment to the forefront. It argues that Morocco was able to maintain its independence for more than eleven centuries despite having been targeted by foreign powers from all sides. However, to achieve this, it had to live in almost complete isolation, which deprived it from keeping abreast of the technological progress and of the reformist cultural and political trends that emerged in the Arab Mashreq in the 19th century.

Accordingly, the social, economic and cultural structures sank into a long period of stagnation, which paved the way for colonial rule.⁴⁹

Besides underdevelopment, colonialism is regarded another major factor behind many of the problems still facing Morocco. The report points to the constant foreign pressure to which Morocco was subjected during the 19th century, which compelled it to make concessions of its sovereignty to the extent that when the Protectorate agreement was signed with the French in 1912, it only confirmed the dominant foreign presence which had been in place since the Algeciras Conference of 1906.⁵⁰ Once the colonial authorities took effective control of the country, they adopted a policy that made the Moroccan economy serve the needs of the French Empire. This is why, it is argued, the colonial powers were keen, from the beginning, to determine and control Moroccan products and direct them all to exports to satisfy their interests. Even some basic infrastructural facilities such as roads and railways were designed to facilitate transport of agricultural products and raw materials intended for export.⁵¹ Thus it soon became clear that the colonial authorities did not come, as claimed, to help Morocco to overcome its problems, but to create new ones and not to eradicate backwardness but to reinforce its conditions. When the Moroccan people rebelled against such injustices and the colonialists felt the danger of the rising revolutionary trend, they handed over the reins of power in 1956 to their allies and agents in the country.

The third gruesome factor is represented by dependency which was further reinforced after Morocco regained its formal independence. "The local reactionary forces managed to control the course of events in a way that served their vested interest."⁵² On the grounds of realism, the policies pursued at the economic level ignored the needs and the rights of the masses to employment, education, healthcare and dignity and instead benefited an oligarchy which tied its fate completely to that of foreign capital and acted as mediator to help it to lay its grip on the country's natural resources, causing more poverty, corruption, injustice and repression.⁵³

At the political level the inherited administrative structures from the Protectorate which had served the colonial economy remained by and large the same and continued to deliver the same function. Thus what was called the Moroccanization of the administration was devoid of any significance. Instead of establishing an administrative apparatus according to objective criteria such as competence, ability and expertise, it was maintained as it had been during the colonial era. Only some figures were replaced by others, but clientelism, corruption and abusive use of public power intensified even more after independence.⁵⁴ The end result is that Morocco seems to have been caught in a vicious circle: underdevelopment led to colonialism, and colonialism created dependency which in turn has aggravated underdevelopment. The question is how to break this vicious circle and cope effectively with this gruesome three-dimensional scourge?

The report proposes a plan comprising three basic components: liberation, democracy and socialism. To achieve true liberation the report stresses that there are a number of tasks that must be implemented. Agrarian reform should be in the forefront because no social justice can be imagined without reforming such a vital sector in the country. The importance of reform in this sphere is emphasized not because it would enable the producers to benefit from their production activities and thereby secure a decent life but also because it would open up wide trading opportunities for the products of other economic sectors namely the industrial sector and allow for fruitful interaction between agriculture and industry.⁵⁵

A second task is to build an industrial base for development, and “this requires establishing integrated industrial projects which ensure the unity of the economic system and in the meantime severs all the chains that tie the various branches of production in the country to the imperialist-capitalist decision-making centres.”⁵⁶ In this way, it is argued, an important step would be taken on the way to liberation and socialism.

A third task is that foreign economic relations and trade should come under control through the implementation of measures that seek not only to nationalize partly or wholly the country's export but also to liberate gradually the channels of trade

activities and coordinate between the various production branches of the national economy.⁵⁷ A fourth important task that the report stresses is that collective needs should take precedence over individual interests. This is not only one of the major requirements of true liberation and social justice but also a condition upon which economic efficiency depends, for it allows for sustaining and enhancing the existing workforce.⁵⁸

The other important element in the plan to overcome the different crises facing Morocco is democracy. In the view of the USFP, it is impossible to conceive of democracy taking root in the country unless the monarchy is reformed and replaced by a constitutional monarchy that allows for the emergence of democratic institutions.⁵⁹ This is the true beginning for the state to become what the USFP calls “the national democratic state”. It should be noted here that “the national democratic state”, as understood by the USFP, has nothing to do with the concept adopted by the Russian revolution in 1917 for the simple reason that the prevailing circumstances in Morocco differ thoroughly from those that were dominant in Russia at the time; nor is it similar to the existing model in European capitalist countries where the bourgeois national state tries to conceal its nature through the democratic game. The national democratic state which the USFP claims to cling to is a state for all of its citizens and could only be achieved through a continuous process of liberation with a socialist horizon.⁶⁰ The implication here is that though much emphasis is placed on democracy, it does not mean that the USFP has given up its socialist ideology. On the contrary it is still faithful to it as always, but it believes that socialism could be realized under democracy and with democracy, especially if free and transparent elections are held regularly.⁶¹ This, according to some observers, attests to a crucial shift in the position of the USFP.⁶²

The third element in the plan adopted by the USFP to reform government and society is socialism. The report contends that socialism is not a mere slogan, but rather a system that entails, among other things, “the collective ownership of the means of production and the major exchanges which should be under the direct control of the producers to determine the choices, the criteria and priorities in the spheres of development and management, taking into account, before anything

else, the interests and the needs of the masses.”⁶³ Another component of socialism is socialist planning which, in the view of the USFP, entails the establishment of regional development areas in order to deal with the concentration of economic activities in the places and fields chosen by the regime at the expense of other regions in the country. By spreading economic activities evenly, it is argued, the national economy would play a crucial role in achieving social coherence, a high degree of integration among the different regions of the country and a just distribution of income.⁶⁴

However, the USFP warns against the pitfall of bureaucratization. It maintains that socialist planning should not be carried out by “a coercive organ which imposes its decisions on everybody including the proletariat itself in the name of the proletariat dictatorship.”⁶⁵ In such a case, it would become an autonomous apparatus with its own demands and interests instead of representing and being at the service of the whole society.⁶⁶

6.2.2 Coping with embarrassing issues

In the early days after its founding, the USFP had to address three major issues to dispel any possible misunderstandings that could brew under the cover of one reason or another and overthrow all the efforts made to devise a new effective strategy in the struggle for political change. The first concerns the decision of the USFP to join and get actively involved in the so-called “national consensus” to face the new challenges arising from the Western Sahara conflict. Some militants, as well as some observers, maintain that after two failed coups d’etat and growing public protests against the regime, Hassan II brought to the fore the issue of Western Sahara to divert the people’s attention and unite them around a common cause. Therefore, though the idea of “national consensus” into which the USFP was dragged seemed to serve a national cause, in reality it benefited more a regime that was in deep crisis than the opposition. It was also claimed that by endorsing “the national consensus” created by the monarch, the USFP sacrificed the class struggle for the national question, which contravenes the ideology of the party. Furthermore, by its support of “the national consensus”, the USFP, whether

it liked it or not, conferred “national legitimacy” on a system of rule it claimed to oppose.

On the eve of its third convention in December 1978, the USFP tried to clarify all these points. It argued that joining the other Moroccan political parties to defend a national common cause did not in any way affect its attitude towards an absolute system of rule. It claimed it was the first party which called for the return of the occupied Western Sahara in 1972 and it even proposed some ideas on how to secure its liberation. The reference here is to a statement released on 8th October 1972 by the UNFP Central Committee, urging the Moroccan authorities to take the necessary steps to complete the liberation of the remaining occupied Moroccan lands, that is, before the so-called UNFP group in Rabat led by Abderrahim Bouabid split from UNFP and founded a new party, USFP, in 1974.⁶⁷

The USFP also denied the allegation that by joining “the national consensus”, it had virtually sacrificed the basic aspect of its ideology. The USFP, faithful to its ideological line, claimed to be the party of the oppressed people including workers, small farmers and traders and revolutionary intellectuals whereas the historical adversary of these oppressed people is the conservative class which is comprised of feudalists and exploiting bourgeois; and when the USFP refers to its adversary, it means exactly this exploiting class and therefore cannot condone its practices or its hegemony on the country’s national resources at the expense of the deprived people.⁶⁸

Furthermore, assuming that the battle to reclaim the country’s long occupied south provinces entails that a national issue should take priority over class struggle, is there anything wrong with that? The answer of the USFP is a resounding NO. For this reason the USFP claimed that it had taken the right stand and managed to avoid the fatal error that some leftist groups had incurred when they focused on the class struggle at the expense of the national question and as a result found themselves isolated from the masses and more vulnerable. That said, the USFP pointed out that it did not agree that the national and class struggle should be perceived through the prism of priorities. It believed that the two types of struggle

were necessarily linked and could not be separated, particularly in the third world and as long as the exploiting class in these countries was represented by imperialist and colonial forces whereas the local exploiting class acted merely as their agent.⁶⁹

Concerning the claim that by joining “the national consensus”, the USFP conferred “national legitimacy” on a regime it sought to change, the leaders of the party dismissed it as baseless. The proponents of such a view, claimed the leaders of the USFP, seemed to forget that all classes, whether they are feudalists, bourgeois or proletariat in an independent country all enjoy “national legitimacy” for the simple reason that they all belong to the same nation. Thus, it would be irrelevant to raise the issue of “national legitimacy” unless it involved a foreigner whereas the existing political power in Morocco since 1956 has been managed by Moroccans and not by foreigners. However, though the Moroccan regime could not be denied “national legitimacy”, it was certainly neither “popular” nor “democratic”. The core idea that the USFP seems at pains to defend here is that there is no contradiction between engaging in the struggle to reclaim the Western Sahara from within “the national consensus” and the struggle for democracy and change from within and without “the national consensus”.⁷⁰

The second issue that the USFP had to address related to its attitude towards the elections which had always been massively rigged and there was no indication that they would truly reflect the will of the people under the prevailing circumstances as the elections of 1976 and 1977 clearly showed . The political report delivered by Abderrahim Bouabid at the third convention of the USFP explains how and why the party took part. It states that the decision was taken, after responsible, fruitful debate, by the higher governing bodies of the party for two basic reasons. The first is that the higher authorities in the country pledged to respect freedom of voting in order to usher in a new era of democracy in Morocco and to enhance national unity to be up to the challenges surrounding the country’s territorial integrity. The second reason is that the party wanted to seize the opportunity of the elections to communicate directly with the masses about local and national problems, and this

in and of itself was claimed to be very important because it would help to deepen democratic and socialist awareness among the Moroccan people.⁷¹

As is usually the case under authoritarian regimes, promises are easier made than fulfilled, and it is no wonder that the elections of 1976 and 1977 were far from being fair and transparent. Strangely enough, though the USFP denounced what it described as fraud-tainted elections, it decided to continue to work from within the institutions on the grounds that it wanted to uncover corruption and exploitation and also so as not to give “the enemies of Morocco’s territorial unity” the opportunity to use the party’s withdrawal from the parliament and municipal councils to carry out their smear campaign against the Moroccan people.⁷² Admittedly, it seems that there is some reason why some people were not totally convinced by this argument.

The third issue that imposed itself persistently after the foundation of the USFP concerned its organizational situation. Wasn’t the party well organized? Not quite, according to an internal document drafted by the Preparatory Committee for the third convention of 1978, noting that the USFP was until then more of an ideological and political force than a well-organized party.⁷³ Meanwhile the leaders of the USFP were not unaware of this flaw and they knew from their former experience in the UNFP the dire consequences it could have. Therefore, as they got prepared for the third convention, they thought the moment had come to take the necessary measures to have a well-organized and firmly coherent party able to make decisions and have them implemented quickly and effectively. To achieve this, the party declared that it firmly clung to the “democratic centralism”, a concept defined by Lenin as “freedom of discussion, unity of action.”⁷⁴ Nevertheless, further clarifications were deemed necessary and all the more so to make sense of a concept that is seemingly contradictory.

By “democratic” it is meant that all the governing bodies of the party should be freely and transparently elected by the party members, but the decisions are taken after free debate by the governing bodies and not by the members. As for “centralism”, it means that once the decisions are made, as explained, all members

are expected to uphold and implement them as required without discussion. This does not mean that the party members are not allowed to voice their criticisms. On the contrary, criticism and self-criticism are legitimate, but they should not be made public. They should be raised at the meetings of the party organizations and the governing bodies at the local as well as at the national level. What is not acceptable, however, is to use criticism as a tool to harm the party coherence or impede its activities. Criticism, it is argued, is welcomed but it should be constructive with the aim of improving the performance of the party and strengthening its unity.⁷⁵

With regard to accountability, it should be practised top-down and bottom-up. The local governing bodies are accountable to the national party leadership, and the local and national leaders are accountable to the party members who are entitled to renew or withdraw their support of any leadership member when they stand for election at the local and national conventions.⁷⁶ With such measures and safeguards, the USFP claimed it would be safe against both “absolute centralism” which would make the party subject to despotic leadership and “anarchic democracy” which would weaken the party and speed up its disintegration.⁷⁷ The question is: were these measures enough to secure the intended results?

6.2.3 A critical assessment of the “democratic struggle” strategy

When we consider the early years of the USFP, especially after its extraordinary convention in 1975, the hopes it stood for at the time and the respect it commanded even from those who did not share its ideological line, we hardly believe the sad current situation into which it has degenerated. In fact, the precipitous collapse is so perplexing that it may constitute a phenomenon in its own right worthy of a separate study. A plethora of questions may come to mind when one ponders the fiasco of a party, believed for some time, and rightly so, to be the country’s premier political party. The failure we are referring to here is not just of the strategy it devised to bring about the social and political reforms it had dreamt of, nor merely of the instrument/ the party which was expected to be

decisive in the accomplishment of those goals and dreams, but also of the image of “the committed socialist militant” in the country.

What many Moroccans have found incomprehensible is how someone who had militated for years denouncing corruption, injustice, poverty, gross social inequities and as a result he may have endured all sorts of suffering ranging from harassment and torture at the police stations or in secret detention centres to long years of imprisonment or exile – how this very person, when given a chance to practice what they preach, failed the test resoundingly. Many people could not believe how a mature person who may have spent the bulk of his life defying, and for very good reasons, an absolute system of rule turns out to be *plus royaliste que le roi* [more royalist than the king] or worse, and as corrupt if not more than the ruling elite. If the reference here is only to one or a few cases, one may not be surprised, for something of the sort does happen everywhere, but the phenomenon is of such a magnitude that it should give cause for serious reflection. So what happened?

To begin with a very simple common explanation, some believe that there is nothing surprising in the experience of the USFP. They contend that this is just “a band of opportunists” who battled not to reform the political system but rather to secure their share of the cake. Once they were given the opportunity, they behaved as expected. One critic goes even further to infer from the willingness of the USFP to continue to take part in government despite its humiliation in 2002 when the king ignored the party that won the elections, i.e. the USFP, and chose Driss Jettou, a technocrat to lead the government that the Moroccan politics demonstrates that “the predatory mentality is dominant. [...] The struggle is implacable for the immediate sharing of the spoils... For politicians, the culmination of a political career is to be minister.”⁷⁸

It seems, to me at least, that to regard a whole generation of militants and intellectuals who endured a lot of suffering in their fight against authoritarianism as “a mere band of opportunists” or just “seeking to secure their share of the spoils” and that each was longing to be a minister one day- this type of explanation,

though common, seems to be rash if not simplistic. It only describes the outcome but does not delve deeper into the phenomenon to analyze it carefully and try to find out a more convincing explanation.

However, Najib Akesbi, a respected economist and former member of the USFP, has a different view. He thinks that the failure of the USFP was a consequence of deadly errors, which he summarizes as follows:

Since 1989... the party abandoned its political strategy adopted in the extraordinary convention of 1975, had for the first time in its history said “yes” to a constitution that was barely indistinguishable from its previous ones, participated in many general elections and accepted their results which were as fraudulent as in the past, and allied itself with (royalist) parties to form a majority with strange bedfellows and a government without a soul.⁷⁹

Though this passage accurately depicts what happened, it does not explain why this series of blunders occurred, unless it considers the shift in strategy as the root cause of the rest; nor does it tell us why the whole party engaged into such a slippery trajectory until it virtually crumbled. We are not talking here about a small group or a few individuals, but about a major, if not the most important party in Morocco. Wasn't there anything or anybody that could have rescued the party and prevented its downfall? In the view of a former leading member of the USFP, Mohamed Sassi, it was too late, adding that when the party joined what was called the *alternance* government in 1998, it had already lost control of its members, most of whom had become more concerned about their own personal interests than anything else. Thus, the decline of the USFP seemed unavoidable.⁸⁰

According to another explanation, the failure of the strategy adopted by the USFP to yield the expected results is due to a serious vacuum in leadership after the death of the party's secretary general, Abderrahim Bouabid, in 1992. It is argued that A. Bouabid was an eminent figure with “strong political abilities as a leader”⁸¹ and that “he brilliantly succeeded in maintaining unity and continuity, giving the USFP an identity and a sense of purpose that other parties lacked.”⁸² He also knew well how to cope with “a ruthless but canny authoritarian regime.”⁸³ But when he died, nobody seemed to have the leadership qualities he enjoyed to lead the party along the path it took in 1975. Since his death, so runs the argument, the party

“never recovered from the passing away of its towering figure.”⁸⁴ Problems accumulated and cleavages started to develop until the party became almost paralyzed. What can you expect from a party in such a state?

Granted that the leader of the USFP was as described, does it make sense that a big, modern party like the USFP should be dependent on a single person to the extent that it thrives as long as the leader is alive, but if he disappears, it quickly follows suit and sinks into oblivion? If such were the case, we might just as well consider that the USFP was never in any significant modern way a political party and that its failure was a matter of course.

In the view of other critics the failure of the “democratic struggle strategy”, as the USFP calls it, was expected from the outset. It was just a matter of time. The reason is that the USFP was never as coherent as it looked. Since its inception it faced many structural and political issues and despite the efforts it made, it never managed to address them satisfactorily. As a result the internal quarrels about almost everything never stopped and when they did appease under particular compelling circumstances, they soon broke out again, causing tension and disarray within the ranks of the party. It is these infightings, it is argued, that eroded the party, tainted its credibility, hampered its progress and thwarted its plans. When Abderrahman Yousfi assumed the leadership of the USFP, he himself spoke on numerous occasions of the ills that were plaguing his party.⁸⁵ Such being the case, it is implied, one can hardly expect a party suffering from such debilitating obstacles to achieve anything worthy of merit.

It is true that internal differences and contradictions are not very helpful for a political party, or any group for that matter, keen to undertake a serious project, let alone seeking to change a despotic system of rule. A certain degree of difference is no doubt understandable and even desirable for the organization’s internal dynamics, but if it exceeds a certain limit, it will become a disaster. However, it is hard to say for sure whether the differences that existed within the USFP were of the type that could be tolerated or not and whether they were the most decisive

factor or just one among others that contributed to the failure of the strategy pursued by the USFP.

Unlike the explanations which tend to focus on the political culture or the inefficiency of the tool of implementation -the party-, there is yet another explanation that blames the failure on the nature of the strategy itself adopted by the USFP. Anouar Boukhris, a Moroccan researcher, has remarkably summarized the idea:

The socialists' entry into government *on the king's terms* [emphasis mine] in 1998 and their agreement to rejoin the government in 2002 after being denied the prime ministry brought an end to a chapter in which the party, despite all its flaws and contradictions, had resisted outright cooptation. Yousfi, like Ibrahim before him and *those who thought they could democratize the system from within* [emphasis mine], was outmaneuvered by the monarch who successfully enticed them to enter his government and legitimize his dominance of society without giving anything substantial in return.⁸⁶

Two key points should be underlined in this passage: the first is the “entry into government on the king’s terms”; and the second concerns “those who thought they could democratize the system from within”. Here, in my view, lies the clue for a better understanding of the root cause of the problem. Put it simply, the strategy of working from within is fundamentally flawed and as such is doomed to fail, irrespective of whoever adopts it and whatever their political persuasion. Proponents of this strategy assume that it would be possible to reduce the domination of the despotic ruler bit by bit until he gives way completely to the establishment of a true democracy. They do not seem to be aware of the risks lurking in such a line of thinking. They assume that the ruler knows nothing of their intentions or that he would gladly let them curtail his authority substantially or even remove him from power if they saw fit.

This is the fatal error that the leaders of the USFP made. It seems that they underestimated the monarch’s strategies and tactics. The reality is that when he allowed their entry into the system, he had made his own calculations and was sure that the chances for the success of his plans were higher than those of his opponents. Given the resources at his disposal, he would try whatever he could to tarnish their reputation, encourage division among their ranks, try to co-opt key

members in the party and thereby abort their plans. If some members still showed some resistance, time and the eroding effect of the system would take charge of them.

Imagine, for instance, a modest wage-earner who can hardly make ends meet suddenly finds that his income has increased by ten to twenty times after winning a seat in Parliament or being offered a high-ranking government post. His living conditions are bound to change dramatically and he is likely to find out that more of his interests can be secured with ease. Would this person still be determined to press for the required reforms whatever the consequences? Perhaps, but some, at least, are likely to become pawns to the new living circumstances and they may think twice before they engage in what may expose them to the risk of losing the newly acquired privileges. Those who do not experience a complete change of heart may still try to find every excuse to justify policies and decisions they are normally expected to oppose. This is not to say that these people are rascal by nature or that they are all out just for personal gain, but rather to underline the logical outcome of adopting an approach that involves, among other things, eroding the politics of resistance, taming defiant wills, and shaping submissive attitudes and perceptions, a process that is sometimes referred to as “the engineering of consent”⁸⁷.

To be sure most, if not all, autocrats find the strategy of luring their opponents into the system more effective than outright oppression. For this reason, some theorists have warned against the traps that lurk in the idea of accepting to work from within an absolute system to try to reform it. Gene Sharp, for example, who has written extensively on the subject, argues that although the call to work from within can sound appealing, the traps and dangers abound and are very serious. He explains:

When the issues at stake are fundamental, affecting religious principles, issues of human freedom, or the whole future development of the society, negotiations do not provide a way of reaching a mutually satisfactory solution. On some basic issues there should be no compromise.⁸⁸

This does not mean that he endorses violence as an effective option to cope with dictatorships, but he believes that negotiating with autocrats or using violence

against them, both strategies are detrimental and play in the hands of dictators more than they benefit the oppressed people. If we accept such a view and consider that entry into fake institutions and on the ruler's terms is no better or no more helpful than is engagement into violent action as a means to bring about political change, then it is no wonder that the search for a strategy that works should continue to be a subject of special interest.

6.3 Conclusion

Since the early years of independence, especially when it became clear that the monarchy was determined not to share power but to rule as it saw fit, the question, as we have seen, which has dominated the hearts and minds of many Moroccan people is: how to throw off the yoke of authoritarianism and establish a system of rule that recognizes the dignity, freedom, and sovereignty of the people? The more this awareness increases and continues to spread among the population as to the source of the mounting social and political grievances, the more that question acquires acuteness and urgency. "Why not us?" many young people wonder as they watch TV and follow the news or read about democratic countries, just within a stone's throw, where the people's voice makes a difference and where heads of states or of government come and go without any fuss.

As discussed above, the revolutionary and the democratic struggle options have been tried to find the long-awaited answer and resolve what is sometimes referred to as "the Moroccan equation". The leftist leader Ben Barka and his comrades opted for revolution on the grounds that it was the only solution to pave the way for radical change. Though this strategy did pose serious threat to the regime for some time, it failed to achieve the intended results. Various explanations have been advanced to explain its failure. Though it may be hard to pinpoint the decisive reason why it did not succeed, three factors, to my mind, are worthy of note: the first is its violent nature; the second has to do with external relations; and the third relates to underestimating the culture of the Moroccan people. That said, the attempt was crushed ruthlessly, and "the revolutionary option" became a thing of the past with many lessons to ponder.

The USFP, a major national political party in Morocco, tried another option which it called “the democratic struggle strategy”. It sought to reform the system from within, claiming to have learnt from the bitter experience of the revolutionary choice. However, it suffered the same fate, if not worse. Its entry into the system and on the king’s terms proved a disaster. Instead of changing the system, it was the party which was processed until it was completely sapped dry. The tragic consequence of this attempt is that given the success of the regime to co-opt most prominent members of the party, the image of “the committed socialist militant” suffered a deadly blow and so did the value of politics and political engagement in general. Disillusionment, distrust, political apathy and the like became widespread among the Moroccan people. Once again the regime emerged victorious and it shifted its attention to focus on a new fast-rising opposition force represented by *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*. What strategy does the latter propose? Could it be a viable alternative? This is the issue to be explored in more detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 7 *Al-Adl wal-Ihsan's* Third-Way Strategy

Two quotations may be fitting to set the scene for examining the strategy of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* in this chapter. In the first, commenting on the idea of a form of power-sharing between the Islamic movements and the tyrannical rulers advocated by some voices, Sheikh Yassine states: "It is indeed an unjust arrangement and an unfair division according to which the "obscurantists" would be accorded a dark bleak corner in the government to undertake some tasks while the dictators have the upper hand and the final word. [...] We will never agree to such a position."¹ In the second and in the same vein Yassine expresses resolve "to dash any hope of seeing ourselves one day committing the political mistake that is both a moral fault and a default on our commitment to non-violence, that is, of laying ourselves open to civil war..."²

These two statements tell us in a nutshell about the attitude of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* towards the "revolutionary option" as well as the choice which seeks change "from within the system". Yassine and his group seem adamant in their rejection of both options. The former, in their view, involves violence and bloodshed and the latter boils down to meaningless politics and, at best, delay of better days indefinitely. However, if "neither participation nor revolution"³ seems to work, then what is the alternative? Bearing in mind that the least they ask for is that those responsible for the misery of the Moroccan people should go, how do they plan to achieve such a daunting objective? Is what they propose practical and plausible or is it merely an exercise in wishful thinking? Can the strategy they advocate as an alternative to the previous ones allow for the accomplishment of two objectives which appear hard to reconcile: radical change through peaceful means?

These are indeed some of the frequently asked questions that this chapter tries to examine closely. It will try to find out about the nature of the suggested strategy

and how it differs from the ones the movement rejects and what it proposes at the practical level in order to secure the conditions for an orderly change with less tension and disruption. This chapter will also shed light on the factors that inspire confidence in the proponents of and sympathizers with this strategy and how it is perceived by some critics. However, before delving into these issues, it is useful to start first with the analysis that underpins the movement's attitude and seems to account for its choice of what it considers a viable third way.

7.1 Diagnosing the current situation

Two serious events in the Muslim history are claimed to have devastating consequences. In fact, they are regarded as the root source of most, if not all, of the serious problems from which the Islamic *Umma* is still suffering to this day. The first, described by the leader of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* as “the great deviation”, occurred in the seventh century –the first century of the Islamic Calendar– when the Islamic system of rule called *khilafa ar-Rachida* was toppled and replaced by a hereditary despotic monarchy in 663.⁴ This opened the way to all the disasters that have befallen the Muslim nation since then. With the end of the remarkable, consultative form of government, argues Yassine, which was established by the Prophet of Islam and maintained by his four Rightly-Guided Caliphs, *shura* [consultation], freedom, justice and *ihsan* were all gone too: “voices speaking against what was wrong and unacceptable were silenced; free speech was suppressed and *ijtihad* [independent reasoning] was brought to an end.”⁵ Scholars were not allowed to deal with political issues such as the right of the *Umma* to choose its leader and the necessity of the ruler's accountability to the people and the like, and those who did not comply and challenged the political authority were ruthlessly crushed.

“[It] was a severe blow,” contends Yassine, “and its repercussions reverberated throughout our history like the convulsions of an earthquake.”⁶ He even expresses his dismay how some scholars turn a blind eye to this shattering event in the Muslim history and tend to underestimate it and focus instead on the positive

accomplishments of that period which, despite their importance, cannot offset the disaster incurred by the establishment of despotic hereditary monarchy.⁷ The authoritarian form of government, monarchical or otherwise, which still dominates the Muslim lands in clear violation of the Islamic principles started to take effect and root since that moment when the Islamic rule was struck at its foundation and turned into coercive rule.⁸

It follows then that for the Islamic *Umma* to restore its dignity, freedom and its confiscated right to choose its rulers and hold them accountable, there must be an end to authoritarianism whatever shape and whatever hue, religious or secular, it has taken. Sheikh Yassine believes that no reform is possible nor is any development unless the corrupt regimes dominating Muslim countries are removed or radically reformed. This is a crucial idea on which the movement of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* insists in its discourse. It is considered an important step on the way to a sound awareness without which the people might just as well indulge as long as they like in wishful thinking. *Al-Adl wal-Ihsan* holds that the people must face hard facts and be prepared to get involved to recover their freedom and cope with the present predicament.

The second event which is equally serious, though it may be regarded from another perspective as a result of the first, is colonialism and its sequels. Capitalizing on a period of weakness and hard times which the Islamic *Umma* was undergoing as a consequence of centuries of despotism, the colonial powers occupied Muslim lands by force, controlled their political and economic affairs and subjected the people to all sorts of exploitation and humiliation.

Yassine directs a scathing condemnation to the colonial powers for their hypocrisy, arrogance and the inhumane policies they unscrupulously implemented in the occupied countries. They never admitted, he remarks, that the aim of their transgression was to rob and pillage these countries and use them as markets for their products, recruit cheap labour for their industries and their businesses,

employ the indigenous people in large numbers in European wars such as World War I and II or to send them fight in places as far as Indochina where most were either killed or injured. The declared mission of the colonizers was to civilize these nations, help them to get out of the stage of barbarism, embrace modernity and get involved in civic life.⁹

The consequences of the unjust and unjustified policies carried out by the colonial authorities are, in the view of Yassine, more deleterious and far-reaching than it is usually assumed. Unlike some writers who tend to focus their attention on the material losses, Yassine underlines the psychological effects. He maintains that one of the most serious damages inflicted upon the Muslims during the colonial era was not confined to the fact that their wealth was plundered or that many of them were killed or maimed in wars not theirs, but rather lay in the process to which they were subjected till they accepted the colonial division as an unquestioned fact, allowing this sense of divisiveness to take root in their hearts and minds to the extent that the economic and administrative structures in their countries were tightly linked to the colonial capitalist system.¹⁰

The other devastating damage, continues Yassine, resulting from the domination of the colonial powers was to succumb to the sway of the invaders' cultural hegemony.¹¹ Admittedly, remarks Yassine, this submission did not come about immediately or spontaneously. It was rather the outcome of years of inculcation in the minds that the invaders were entitled to dominate because they were superior and so were their culture, language and customs. To facilitate the spread of such an idea among the indigenous people and make sure that it got absorbed and took root even if they had to leave later, they used the sector of education and set up some schools where they imposed their own curricula and their own values. Though these schools were limited in number and were not accessible to everybody, they were enough to produce a generation totally alienated from their own culture. This is what Yassine refers to as "the offshoots of imperialism",¹² an elite formed in French schools in Morocco or in France or elsewhere and brought

up to deride their Islamic heritage, their Arabic language and culture and to take pride in and identify with the values of the conqueror. It is this westernized elite, continues Yassine, that was going to take over from the colonialists when they departed and that was going to be even harsher towards its fellow citizens than the colonial powers themselves.¹³

The psychological defeat suffered by young Muslims is in Yassine's view more serious than the military defeat. Indeed, Yassine is not alone to hold this view; a number of writers have spoken about the same idea. The reason, it is argued, is that if you are defeated militarily but not psychologically, you will still aspire to do better the next opportunity whereas in case of psychological defeat the individual's personality is shattered to the extent that they lose all hope and see themselves as unfit to accomplish anything worthy or meet any challenges.¹⁴ This phenomenon, according to Yassine as well as other thinkers, largely accounts for the spread of many negative social and psychological aspects such as indifference, political apathy, passivity, loss of self-esteem, frustration and the like in Muslim societies, though the latest signs of a potential rise after decades of slumber under repressive regimes appear to be promising.

It follows from this discussion that the core problem in Morocco has, in the view of the leader of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, two aspects: one is political and the other is cultural. The question is then how to get rid of political despotism and cultural defeatism.

7.2 Towards a new strategy of liberation

To identify the problem is certainly an important step, but it is not enough. The crucial question is how to solve it and the answer is not always obvious or easy to assume its consequences. This appears to explain why the issue of strategy has been assigned a great importance in the writings of the leader and theoretician of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*. The strategy he proposes is claimed to be devised after years of in-depth study of variety of sources, Islamic and non-Islamic, and of numerous past and recent experiences. It has tried to avoid the flaws and pitfalls of the option that

favours violent rebellion and the one that sought to work from within the corrupt system. Only some of its basic features will be presented here.

1. Non-violence: Yassine rejects the revolutionary option because it involves a typical aspect of *jahiliyya*. “We do not like violence,” he says, “and we do not consider it as an option. We seek refuge of God against any traits of violence that is a typical characteristic of *jahiliyya*.”¹⁵ The revolutionary solution is also refused because it is regarded as unrealistic. Because of its rashness and lack of maturity, it thinks it is enough for the change to occur to upset the balance of power and tilt to the preferred group of people and ideology, as if the whole operation is like turning the page to a new one.

Many Islamic texts are quoted in the writings of Sheikh Yassine to prove that his movement’s preference for peaceful struggle is motivated not just by practical reasons or some compelling or tactical considerations but rather by moral principles. From the Quran he cites: “Call towards the way of your Lord with wisdom;”¹⁶ “Offset that which is evil with that which is best;”¹⁷ “Peace is best;”¹⁸ etc. From the Prophet’s sayings he mentions: “God is *rafik* [gentle] and he likes *rifk* [gentleness] and he rewards for gentleness what he does not reward for harshness;” “Whoever is deprived of *rifk* [gentleness] is deprived of all *kheir* [goodness];”¹⁹ and many others. It appears that the purpose of these texts is not only to explain the choice of the movement but also to serve as a response to two categories of people: those who hold extremist ideas, though small in number, thinking wrongly that Islam sanctions violence; and those who claim that the movement is “too much peaceful” and has negatively impacted the aspirations of young people for serious social and political change.

Despite criticisms from opponents and provocation from the Moroccan authorities to drag the movement into violence, *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* seems to have taken its irreversible choice, that is, never to resort to violence as a means to achieve its goals, whatever the circumstances, and is determined to remain as its leader has

put it in French in his letter to King Mohamad VI: “*Nous restons cette ‘force tranquille’ de proposition.*”²⁰[Italics mine]

2. Gradualism: It is an established fact, notes Yassine, that “it usually takes some time, persistent struggle and perseverance before people can respond to the caller to God, and before faith enter their hearts and be expected to come together and get organized.”²¹ This is why, he continues, *sabr* [patience] is described in the Quran as one of the most prominent characteristics of God’s Prophets and Messengers and they are cited as an example for all to follow. Patience, positive patience, he means, is essential because it is very difficult for people to give up their old customs and habits especially when they are deeply entrenched and have come to dominate the lives of certain people.²² This psychological aspect should not be ignored in order not to be frustrated or take rash decisions. Time is decisive in the equation of reforming societies; hence the importance of gradual process.

Al-Adl wal-Ihsan is said to be for incremental reform also because the legacy of centuries of tyranny is appalling and to cope with it and restructure society on a solid basis cannot be achieved at the stroke of a pen. “The gross error,” argues Yassine, “that some revolutionary groups make is that when they see that their numbers have grown, they start to think they can realize the impossible... Thus, they may embark upon an adventure the outcome of which may be catastrophic for them and their fellow citizens.”²³

3. Clarity: It is another principle that the Islamists, in Yassine’s view, should strictly adhere to: clarity of objectives, clarity about what steps to take and what course of action to pursue, etc. He also believes that it is in line with this principle that the people must be faced with the hard reality, and the hard reality is that the corrupt political system “has devastated the moral fibre of the community, corroded its economy, squandered its wealth and dispersed the oppressed far and wide... It is the root cause behind the spread of unemployment, drugs, diseases, alcoholism, prostitution and a host of other ills and hardships.”²⁴ The idea here is not only to

stress that the situation is catastrophic and define those responsible but also to emphasize that these problems would not be resolved if the people continued to just complain and adopt the wait-and-see attitude. They must know that the road to reform is long, requires sacrifices and the engagement of everybody. The efforts of a small group are not enough and cannot by themselves work miracles and sort out all grievances.²⁵

4.Cooperation and dialogue: *Al-Adl wal-Ihsan* does not claim it can shoulder the burden of building a viable political system on its own, nor has it the capacity to do so even if it wanted. In fact the leader of the movement considers it a serious blunder that an organization, whatever its size, should seek to resolve by itself the complex socio-economic and political problems of Morocco or that it should burn all bridges of communication and remain isolated in an ivory tower, living in a dream world of its own.²⁶ Therefore, his movement is said to be committed and ready to cooperate with others whatever their political convictions and whenever and wherever this is possible provided this cooperation does not infringe or run counter its strategic peaceful course of action. It has announced on various occasions that it is open to dialogue in order to work out a formula that allows the vital forces of the country to come together in order to create the conditions in which a peaceful transition and comprehensive reform can succeed. However, this does not mean that the movement intends at any moment to negotiate any deal with what it considers a rotten regime determined to maintain the status quo. The strategy of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, as its leader has put it, differs from the strategy of some hesitant elements of the Islamic movement who are seeking conciliation with the fraudsters and deceivers.²⁷

5.Flexibility: Apart from established principles, Yassine believes that “rigidity and fixity are synonyms of death.”²⁸ A dynamic organization, in his view, should be flexible in order to coexist with the various political sensibilities in the country.²⁹ Flexibility is also important in case of unexpected occurrences or dire necessities³⁰. It is especially important when it comes to the methods and mechanisms to be

used in the struggle against political illegitimacy. A distinction must be made, it is argued, between the goals and the means. If the goals are fixed, the means should be subject to constant reassessment, improvement or even change. It should be noted, however, that contrary to certain ideologies which consider that the ends justify the means, the Islamic principles do not permit such an idea and demand that the means as well as the ends must be legitimate.

That said, the Islamists, in the view of Yassine, should diversify their means and methods and be alert to what he terms “the historical moments”. No one can predict, he argues, when, how and what factor or incident may be the straw that breaks the dictator’s back. Consequently, the Islamists should not underestimate anything or waste any opportunity to achieve further gains; and whatever is gained should be preserved.³¹ The question that arises here is how to keep this balance between resistance and flexibility. Yassine does not give an answer, probably because it is a question of perception and judgement which may differ significantly according to circumstances. Whatever the case may be, the Islamists should be true and sincere to themselves and others. This is their valuable capital, and if some people rely on crowd manipulation, fraud and wild promises they never intend to fulfill, “our strategies,” says Yassine, “to win over supporters and set up an effective force should be different from theirs.”³² It should be based on clarity, transparency, truth and responsibility.³³

6.Priority of social empowerment: In his book, *Justice: The Islamists and Power*, Yassine writes:

The Islamic solution is a great challenge to the people of *dawah* and could pose a great danger if they were all to leave their *dawah* work and be transformed as managers, ministers, advisers, leaving the mosques and the company of the people and relinquishing their primary duty of training and educating the rising generations.³⁴

These sentences tell a lot about the strategic vision of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* concerning the way to bring about the envisioned change. They explain why it is considered of prime importance to get well established at the grass-roots level and not to

compete for seats in parliament or for ministerial portfolios in the government. This is not to downplay the significance of these institutions or to undermine their role. Far from it; *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* does recognize the importance of such institutions and, as is clear from numerous pronouncements of its leaders, if free and transparent elections were to be held, it would not hesitate to seek to be represented but only to a degree that should not deviate it from its strategic trajectory, which is to stay close to the people. *Al-Adl wal-Ihsan* claims to have a “comprehensive societal project” and it is at the level of society that “*le travail de fond*” [substantial work] should be undertaken. “It is there where the decisive struggles should be fought,” as one senior member of the movement has put it.³⁵

Some critics claim that *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* focuses on charitable services and exploits the poverty of the people in order to increase its following. Providing educational and medical assistance to some poor families, housing assistance to some students coming out of town, helping some poor people to meet the expenses of Islamic Eids, or of marriage, birth or death ceremonies and the like services are not meant, according to these critics, to merely assist the needy without expecting anything in return, but rather to recruit new members and enhance the movement’s popularity. The leaders of *Al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, however, deny such an allegation, arguing that it is not by encouraging alms-giving or, as one has put it, by promoting beggary that the battle of freedom, justice, dignity and development could be won.³⁶ Though the idea of providing help for the downtrodden is certainly appreciated and not to be excluded, to reduce the project of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* to charity activities is regarded as unfair. Its outlook is said to be much broader and more profound than that, as Yassine explains in the following words:

Our goal is to free the people from the bond of slavery, from submission to others without questioning, to awaken them to get rid of their passivity, of their “follow the herd” mentality resulting from a long tradition of submission and indifference so that they can understand, choose, get involved and take action and not to be at the mercy of others or live as hostages.³⁷

To achieve such a goal, Yassine and his group believe that more time, energy and work need to be devoted to social empowerment which in turn can only be realized

if the Islamists stay close to the people and frequent their markets, work places, schools, universities, clubs and wherever they are in the rural as well as in the urban areas.³⁸ Only in this way, they think, can the people recover their confidence in their capabilities to imagine, aspire to and work for a better future.

7.3 Supporting factors

It appears that the goal set by *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* is no easy one, calling for nothing less than the removal of an absolutist system of rule which has been in place for centuries. Meanwhile, its claim and insistence that it could be achieved through peaceful means seems to be perplexing and intriguing. How can we expect, one may wonder, such a goal to be realized by the pursuit of such an approach? Could it work?

According to the leaders of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, there are a number of factors that inspire their confidence in the viability of their strategy. One of these is the behaviour of the regime itself. The policies it is pursuing cannot even alleviate, let alone resolve in any significant way, the various socio-economic and political ills that are plaguing the Moroccan society. This confirms, so runs the argument, the growing inability of the present regime to rule the country. Problems are accumulating such as unemployment, corruption, moral degeneration and crime, and popular discontent is intensifying as protests and sit-ins are staged almost every day; worst of all, there is no clear strategy that gives a flicker of hope that these crises are going to ease or be resolved any time soon. The regime has proved unable to find a solution even to an issue like road accidents which are claiming thousands of victims every year. Given the way the country is managed or mismanaged, it appears that the Moroccan regime is creating more problems than it solves.

Furthermore, the failure so far of the various attempts to push the monarchy to ease its grip on power, and the determination of the latter to continue to dominate the political as well as the economic fields, and its interference in almost

everything, even in the appointment of heads of certain political parties, associations, committees and the like practices all attest to an insatiable desire to rule alone, preventing all the political forces from bringing their input into the affairs of their country. This has generated a political atmosphere that is fraught with worry and increasing risk to the country, unless some drastic changes are introduced. According to the analysis of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, there is no indication that the regime in Morocco is disposed to consider taking serious steps towards what should be done to improve the conditions of the Moroccan people.

A second factor which has come into play recently is the development, availability and the wide use of the social media. Gone is the time when the regime's human rights violations and injustices could have passed unreported. Now the situation has changed completely and any transgression may be reported on the spot via Skype, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, or other means that are being made available by the new information and communication technology. Even the poor conditions of the people and the humiliation they may be facing in slums and shanty-towns have nowadays more chances to be known widely. A recent video, to cite one example, showing a Moroccan family living in a public toilet compared to a prince's extravagant palace, has been circulating widely on the Internet and is likely to have a profound effect on many viewers.

This shows that the chances for people to expose their plight are more available than it used to be, with the potential of intensifying popular discontent. If the regime controls the national media outlets, it cannot extend its censorship to the social media networking without incurring the wrath of world human rights organizations and tarnishing its already-not-too-bright image even further. Thus, it has tried to respond in a way which cannot be claimed to be very ingenious or creative: it has invested a lot in setting up its own "social networking sites". The question is: can it succeed to counter or neutralize the millions of Internet users? It seems doubtful if not impossible.

A third factor –close to the one just mentioned– relates to the spread, even among the poor population, of TV dishes and hence the ability to follow world TV channels. Until recently the Moroccan people, like other peoples in the third world, could only see the state's controlled TV which offers programmes devoid of any value, to say the least: tedious reports on the monarch's speeches, visits, ceremonial events, and other boring activities. This was more or less the daily dish being served to the viewers. There were no other alternatives. Over the last two decades or so the situation has changed and the Moroccan people, like other Arab audiences, are now exposed to a wide range of international TV channels and have a variety of TV programmes to choose from freely.

More importantly, many topics such as the fabulous riches of the ruling elite, their extravagance, corruption and the like, considered taboo in the past, are now discussed live on air in some TV shows with the chance for the viewers of joining in the live discussion. The daring debates which a TV channel like al-Jazeera, for example, has pioneered in the Arab world have enhanced the opportunities not only to inform the public but also to sharpen its awareness for the need of political accountability, freedom, democracy, justice and equality.

A fourth factor relates to the rise of the Islamic awareness. *Al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, though it enjoys a wide popularity, represents but one part of the current Islamic trend. The frequency and the size of mosque attendance are increasing steadily to such an extent that it has become commonplace that on Fridays thousands of people have to pray outside, in the open areas and streets around the mosques because of the lack of space inside. Though each neighbourhood may have a mosque, the number of attendees is usually more than it can accommodate. This seems to run counter to some strands of modern theory which claimed that religion was about to disappear or at best to play "an increasingly limited societal role in the future."³⁹ What seems to be surprising is that this powerful return of Islam to society is dominated by young males and females, whereas a few decades ago it was confined to middle and old-aged people. Moreover, these young people come

to religion not because they are born in Muslim families which are generally conservative and respectful of Islam, but rather out of personal conviction and of their own volition. Most of them are educated and are fully aware of the nature of their choice.

These developments, in the view of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, point to the direction into which Muslim societies are evolving. It is now almost certain that whenever and wherever free and transparent elections are organized in the Muslim world, Islamic parties are bound to emerge victorious. This seems to indicate that a significant social and political trend is in the making, though “the process is still in its infancy,”⁴⁰ and is likely to have its impact in the Islamic and Arab world in the future. This is in line, it is believed, with a number of prophecies made by the Prophet of Islam concerning the future of the Islamic *Umma*. They all point to the restoration of justice, dignity and freedom after centuries under repressive regimes. Such prophetic texts strengthen further Muslims’ trust and confidence in the future and boost their determination to demand for their confiscated rights.⁴¹

A fifth factor concerns the attitude of foreign powers towards the present rulers in the Arab world. It is no exaggeration that without foreign support, most, if not all, of these rulers may collapse at any moment. However, there is no guarantee that they will continue to be aided forever. At the moment that a ruler becomes, for one reason or another, irrelevant or the thrust of events seems to take a direction that any further support would endanger the interests of those behind him, he could be let down “like a dead rat,”⁴² to use the words of one of the Shah’s generals. Ben Ali of Tunisia, Mubarak of Egypt and Qaddafi of Libya may be just the forerunners of similar events that are likely to follow suit sooner or later.

In Morocco, though the monarchy still enjoys the support of countries like France and USA, the increasing problems resulting from mismanagement, incompetence and widespread corruption have become more and more embarrassing to the regime’s friends. Issues like illegal immigration –from Morocco and other African

countries using Morocco as a transit point—, drugs dealing which includes not only the type produced in Morocco but other dangerous types imported from Latin America before they find their way to Europe, the expanding slums which have become the breeding ground for crime and terrorism... all these issues have become a matter of concern for the neighbouring European countries. In other words, if the regime persists in handling the affairs of the country in the way it is doing, and it is likely it will, it is bound to become a source of trouble not only at the national level, but also at the regional and the international level.

These are some of the factors that *al-Ald wal-Ihsan* take into consideration in its analysis of the current situation in Morocco. Furthermore, these factors as well as the principles the proclaimed strategy is said to be based on also account for a range of ideas and suggestions which have been elaborated and put forward to build consensus building and provide what may be described as a road map for peaceful political change in Morocco, an issue to which we shall turn now.

7.4 Steps for peaceful transition in Morocco

Whatever the reasons behind adopting a different strategy, the question is: how does the movement intend to translate it into practical suggestions able to ensure a peaceful transition from what it considers an absolutist system of rule? It is indeed a question that is raised frequently by many observers who are keen to know what the movement proposes to get the country out of its prolonged socio-economic and political inertia. Drawing on the writings of Sheikh Yassine, some documents produced by the political section of the movement as well as some interviews and pronouncements delivered to various media outlets by senior members of the movement, especially its spokesman, Fath Allah Arsalan,⁴³ four key elements appear to form the core of the movement's proposal for a peaceful transition in Morocco. This section will examine each in turn.

7.4.1 The need for a national pact

7.4.1.1 On the meaning and utility of a pact

In the English Oxford Dictionary the word “pact” is defined as “a formal agreement between individuals or parties.” In the studies concerned with the process of political change from one regime to another, “a pact can be defined as an explicit, but not always publicly explicated or justified, agreement among a select of actors which seeks to define (or, better to redefine) rules governing the exercise of power on the basis of mutual guarantees for the vital interests of those entering into it.”⁴⁴ It is a device to which political forces under certain circumstances may resort “to move from a poor equilibrium with transgressions and the lack of fundamental limits on the state to a stable equilibrium of limited government that can support a stable democracy.”⁴⁵ Pacts, however, are not always easy to make. It depends on the circumstances and on the actors concerned. The reason in the view of some scholars is that the core of a pact requires “a negotiated compromise under which actors agree to forgo or underutilize their capacity to harm each other by extending guarantees not to threaten each other’s corporate autonomies or vital interests.”⁴⁶ The question that arises here is: under what circumstances may those actors be willing to agree to strike such a deal? In one scenario it is suggested that making a pact may be possible when no social or political group is sufficiently dominant to impose “its ideal project”. It would be “a second best solution which none of the actors wanted or identified with completely but all of them can agree to and share in.”⁴⁷

There are a number of countries –in Latin America, Southern Europe, Africa– where pacts proved helpful in the transition from authoritarian rule to the installation of some form of democracy. Though the circumstances and the details of each case may be different from the others, one common feature is that pact making was an important factor that contributed to the creation of a suitable environment for social and political change. It is little wonder that some political

activists in countries still under despotic rule call for the use of such a device to extricate from authoritarian status quo without violence and bloodshed. *Al-Adl wal-Ihsan* is one of those political forces which believe in the importance and the viability of a political pact as the first step towards peaceful change in Morocco. It has advanced a number of reasons to explain why such an arrangement is highly desirable, if not indispensable, in the situation of a country like Morocco. One of these is that it would constitute a viable beginning to save the country from the politics of divide and rule and possible internal breakdown.⁴⁸ The consequences of the dominant logic are far from reassuring as there is not a single sector in the country which is not plagued by corruption and mismanagement. How long people can endure before an explosion of social unrest may erupt, nobody can tell. One thing for sure is that the country may not be very far from such a scenario.⁴⁹ What some people fear most is that in the case of social explosion some issues which may not be a priority or of less importance would crop up and complicate the situation even more. Thus *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* is of the view that the most appropriate beginning to avoid the worst would be to conclude a pact which all the vital forces of the country should agree to and share in.

For *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, as well as for other social and political forces concerned with the current situation in Morocco, a lot of time has already been lost and the country cannot afford any further delays in introducing the required reforms. The Moroccan people, especially the youth, are frustrated as they see no indication of any possible improvement in the short, medium or even the long run. No wonder that many of them take all sorts of risks to cross the Strait of Gibraltar to get to the other side of the Mediterranean where they think their dream of a decent life would be realized. The risks incurred and the tragedies suffered by many of those who had already tried that course of action attest to the worrisome level of despair and frustration permeating society and especially its expanding poor sectors. Thus a serious initiative based on an agreed political pact would, in the view of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, resurrect hope in the hearts and minds of the Moroccan people for a better future. It would also restore credibility to politics.⁵⁰ The Moroccan people have long

ceased to trust politicians, nor do they expect them to bring any significant improvement to their lives. Not surprisingly, the rate of turnout is very low according to the official statistics themselves and the reality may be even worse if we know that the figures are usually inflated and do not reflect the true picture. Even the last parliamentary election, held on 25th November 2011 and claimed to be relatively free compared to the previous ones did not succeed in dissipating growing public scepticism. Of about 25 million eligible to vote, only 13.6 million registered and less than half (6.1million) bothered to go the polling stations.⁵¹

A new beginning is therefore believed to be crucial for the re-emergence of meaningful politics and for encouraging people to get involved, which is a prerequisite for the success of transition and for the ability to overcome the challenges of reconstruction. People may be willing to make sacrifices only if they trust their government and feel that it serves the whole country and not a corrupt minority already “stuffed to the brim”.⁵² Once the majority of people are reassured that their voice will not be ignored any longer and that a new era is bound to begin, they are likely to support the efforts needed for comprehensive social and political reform.

A pact is deemed necessary not only to secure people’s motivation and support but also to allow for smooth, peaceful transition at the least possible cost. This instrument of pact-making has been successful in a number of countries and *al-Adl wal-Ihsasn* claims that it is likely to be also helpful in the Moroccan case.⁵³ In countries where the rulers stubbornly stuck to their position, the losses incurred were extremely high: they neither secured an honoured exist, nor did they spare their countries heavy human and material losses. A pact is consequently believed to be conducive to an arrangement that is beneficial to all. Certainly no one would get what they wanted but they would not lose entirely either. However, what each would win would be significant enough to make the establishment of a new political system worthy and rewarding. It is interesting to note that some rulers refused to make such a move while they were in a better position to do so and that when they

did agree to such an arrangement, they found that the opportunity had been lost for ever. When Ben Ali of Tunisia addressed the Tunisian people saying, “Now I’ve understood you,”⁵⁴ it was too late. More interestingly, similar incidents have occurred several times in history, yet the lessons have amazingly gone unnoticed.

A final reason which is equally important in the view of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* is that pact-making would secure the independence of the Moroccan political will and reduce the risk of foreign intervention which might be solicited by the weaker parties seeking protection.⁵⁵ Experience demonstrates that where foreign intervention occurs, it becomes hard to reach an agreement unless it is befitting those behind the scenes. Thus, many strategists have warned against such a scenario and advise that the political forces seeking change should try to keep the decisions in their hands and not open the door for foreign influences.⁵⁶

7.4.1.2 Conditions of success

As stated earlier, to make a pact is not always easy, however desirable or even necessary it may be. For this reason *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* thinks that some conditions have to be met in order to enhance the chance to make it a successful option. The first important condition is that there should be a climate of reconciliation and mutual trust and respect. Addressing what he calls “honourable democrats”, Sheikh Yassine invites them to forgo their misgivings and stop their smear campaigns against the Islamists to help create such an environment. “Do not pass judgment on our intentions [but on our deeds],” he says, “and do not deny us the right to express our views.”⁵⁷ Yassine is here pointing to the allegations leveled at the Islamists concerning their attitude towards democracy. It is claimed that their intention is to use democracy as a means to come to power, but once they are firmly established, they will install a theocratic system worse than the monarchical rule in place. To be suspicious of one another, contends Yassine, or fight one another or spread rumours and trade in scaremongering only plays in the hands of the monarchy and does not promote the conditions for constructive dialogue and

fruitful cooperation. Thus Yassine repeatedly makes the point that his movement is committed to dialogue and persuasion as the only means to further their objectives. "Our only weapon," he asserts, "is the word, truth and transparency."⁵⁸ He also pledges, as noted earlier, that his movement will never "hang on to power against the consent of the electorate..."⁵⁹

Another important condition to make the pact a success is that it should be inclusive: all political parties, without exception, socio-economic actors, influential figures, regardless of their convictions, should come together to debate in order to work out a suitable formula to effect a peaceful transition. It is important that all the country's political sensibilities should get involved, given the nature of the socio-economic and political problems and the inherited burden of decades, if not centuries, of corruption and mismanagement.⁶⁰ The role of the Islamists in the process is, according to Yassine, unavoidable. "Since we are close to the people," he argues, "we are in a better position to recognize the weighty legacy and its magnitude and thereby the need for the cooperation of all the vital forces to bridge the gaps and rally the scattered efforts to confront the internal devastating factors and the tools of servitude and backwardness."⁶¹ Yassine advances another reason which makes, in his view, cooperation and consensus building crucial. He maintains that "it is foolhardy to think that a single group, no matter how great its numerical strength and howsoever well-equipped, can bear all the burdens of the past, confront all the tragedies of the present and realize the people's aspirations for the future."⁶² Such statements, besides reflecting the harsh realities on the ground, are probably meant to dispel the cloud of scepticism that hangs over the Islamists' intentions with regard to power: the message is that it is inconceivable that they could possibly lay a monopoly on power even if they wanted to.

A third condition for the pacted transition to succeed concerns the role of the people. *Al-Adl wal-Ihsan* supports the view that all the necessary measures should be taken to enable the people to follow and participate directly or through their representatives in the general debate.⁶³ The Moroccan people have long been

marginalized and kept in the dark about the affairs of their country. They are only expected to acquiesce and applaud whatever decisions taken by the government. No wonder that political apathy has become widespread and those who bother to turn up on election day or even register to vote are decreasing incessantly. Therefore, it is necessary to implicate them in the process of change and raise their awareness of the importance of their voice. More importantly, they should be implicated in order to get prepared for the required sacrifices to shake off the yoke of authoritarianism and pave the way for a decent life and a better future. Yassine and his group do not seem to favour what is termed the “elite pact”, that is, an agreement about which the public do not know much or understand what it entails. This may sound utopist or hard to realize. But for Yassine and his movement, a sound beginning requires that the opportunity should be available to all to know what is going on and be able to distinguish reality from fantasy and fact from cheap propaganda.⁶⁴

In the transition period, as envisioned by *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, national media outlets are required to play an important role. They should contribute actively to enlightening the people about the issue under debate. The task should be undertaken in a professional and unbiased manner. All the views should be accurately presented so that people can know for sure who “said what and why” and not fall prey to rumours or biased reports. Furthermore, besides providing a space for the people’s voice, stifled for so long, the media, if it were to function properly, would make it possible for the different ideas to be tested, challenged and elaborated. In this way it is believed that the “good ideas” take hold and the “bad ones” come unstuck.⁶⁵

7.4.2 The need for a new constitution

In the narrower meaning the word constitution refers to “a document having a special legal sanctity which sets out the framework and the principal functions of the organs of government within the state, and declares the principles by which

those organs must operate.”⁶⁶ In the wider sense the term refers to “the whole system of government of a country, the collections of rules which establish and regulate or govern the government.”⁶⁷ The former definition applies to most of the world constitutions; only few [like UK] conform with the latter.

Constitutions are established in different ways, not all of which are considered democratic or acceptable.⁶⁸ One way, regarded as the worst, is when a constitution is unilaterally imposed by the ruler who does not give the people the opportunity to take part in its making. It is a constitution *octroyée*, usually to circumvent the consequences of mounting popular pressure or to give the appearance that the system in place is similar or very close to any established democracy. The problem, however, is not only in the way it is drafted but also in its contents and the manner in which it is approved. It is often tailored to keep all the powers in the hands of the ruler and adopted in a referendum by the notorious “four nine” (99.99%).

Another way to make a constitution, termed sometimes as “contractual”, is when the ruler and the ruled agree, under certain circumstances, to negotiate a formula whereby the vital interests of both sides are maintained. Putting aside the content of such a constitution and the extent to which it reflects the people’s aspirations, the fact that the ruler take part in its making according to certain terms and conditions means that the ruler holds a significant share in the people’s sovereignty and this contravenes the idea that sovereignty resides in the people alone.

A third way to make a constitution is to set up a constituent assembly. This method, widely believed to be democratic and effective in reflecting the people’s wishes, consists of a body of elected representatives of the people with the mandate to draft a constitution and nothing else; and when this task is completed, it is dissolved. It is not necessary to submit the document to the people for approval in a referendum, since it was drafted by their elected representatives in the first place.

A fourth way to enact and adopt a constitution is by means of a referendum. According to this method a committee, whose shape and members may be the outcome of negotiation between the country's active political forces, is set up to fashion out a constitution to the country. However, their proposal is not valid until it is submitted to the people for approval in a referendum. This method is also considered democratic because the people have the final say: they can accept or reject it.

In Morocco the first time the issue of constitution was raised dates back to the beginning of the last century when Abdellah ben Said, a Moroccan scholar, submitted in 1900 the first draft of a constitution to Sultan Moulay Abdelaziz. Then a group of scholars proposed another draft in 1906. Another elaborated attempt was made in 1908 when a group of scholars proposed a constitution of 93 articles to Sultan Moulay Hafid.⁶⁹ These incidents are sometimes cited to make the point that the Moroccan *Ulama* (scholars) were the first to demand a constitution for the state, before any other social or political force in Morocco. Unfortunately, those initiatives were thwarted because of the prevailing circumstances in Morocco at the time. As the country fell under the French colonialism in 1912, the demand for a constitution seemed to have given way to more pressing issues, particularly the ramifications of the foreign presence and their effects on the social and political situation in Morocco. Thus the country had to wait until it recovered its independence in 1956 before the question of constitution was brought to the fore again.

As noted earlier, when Mohammed V returned from exile on 16th November 1955, he delivered his first speech two days later in which he promised great changes and stressed that the establishment of "a constitutional Arab Muslim democratic monarchy" would be given top priority.⁷⁰ However, more than five years elapsed and the Moroccan people were still waiting for that promise to be fulfilled. Mohammad V died on 26th February 1961 and his son, Hassan II, pledged to honour his father's promise. In 1962 the first constitution was indeed drafted, but

unfortunately it fell far short of what was expected. To use the words of one observer, it was cleverly tailored to help the monarch “retain a free hand in politics as befitted his conception of a king,”⁷¹; and though it was revised during his reign five times (in 1970, 1972, 1980, 1992 and 1996), nothing substantial changed and the common feature of them all is that the real power remained in the monarch’s hands⁷². In fact he was not only able “to retain but [also] enlarge upon his prerogatives.”⁷³ Yet, he always considered it one of his outstanding achievements and prided himself to be its “author and editor.”⁷⁴

The situation does not fare any better under the present king, Mohammad VI, despite claims to the contrary and despite the wild promises and slogans launched upon his ascension to the throne in 1999. Violations of human rights continue and freedom of speech and assembly suffer seriously while corruption reigns supreme.⁷⁵ When the Arab world was rocked by the Arab Spring and three regimes collapsed, the Moroccan monarchy responded quickly and once again promised serious reforms and a new constitution. If some people did believe, for a while at least, such promises on the grounds that there was no room left for the old tricky games, others, however, could tell from the way the new constitution was prepared and finally written that the prospects would not be that bright. Indeed, as the saying goes, from the huge cleft in the mountain peak there slowly emerged a tiny little mouse: playing upon words, vague phrasing to allow for different interpretations, splitting some articles into shorter ones while keeping the original content almost intact, making minor concessions here and getting in return significant gains there and the like techniques which have led some observers to conclude that “the king’s executive powers remain unchecked.”⁷⁶

The king, according to the so-called amended constitution, appoints six of the twelve members of the Constitutional Court, including its president; he appoints the ministers of the government and dismisses them if he wants; he can reshuffle the Council of Government whenever he likes; he presides over the Council of Ministers whose prerogatives far outweigh those of the Council of Government,

including the right to appoint high security officials, governors, ambassadors, the central bank governor and executives of strategic public enterprises and establishments; he is the Commander-in chief of the armed forces and makes military appointments; he presides over the Supreme Security council and the *Ulama* (scholars) Council and, as Commander of the Faithful, he can intervene in various ways and make crucial decisions; he decides on strategic orientations and at his initiative he can dissolve the parliament and many more de jure or de facto practices! The following figure [Fig.7.1] demonstrates, in a simplified form, how the king still retains extensive powers:

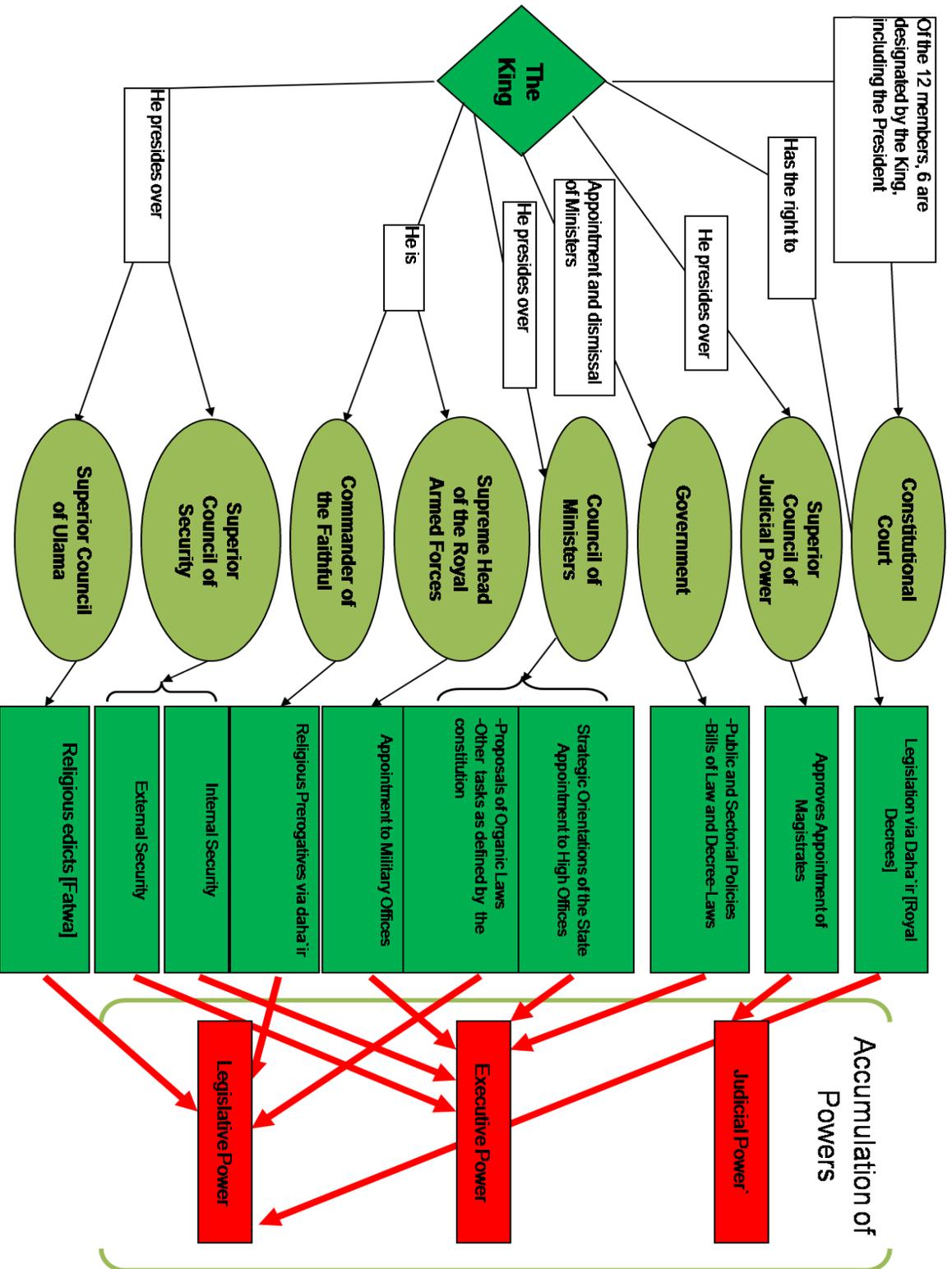


Fig.7. 1: Please note that this figure does not show all the functions of the various organs of government.

As if the various provisions included in the constitution are not enough to guarantee the supremacy of the monarchy, the electoral system and the drawing of district boundaries are engineered in such a way that no political party can even win more than 20% of the seats in the parliament.⁷⁷ Consequently, to form a government would necessarily require a broad coalition of parties the loyalty of most, if not all, to the monarchy cannot be suspected. At any moment and at the slightest signal from the monarch, they can withdraw and make the government fall apart. Even if we assume that the party which emerges first in the elections wanted to press for important reforms, it would find itself paralyzed and bound hand and foot to the royal will.

What is the point, one may wonder, of having a constitution of the sort? A major function of the expected constitution is that it should lay out the basic structure of the government in such a way as to prevent confusion of powers and despotic rule. If a political system, as one author points out, fails to do so and instead puts all the major powers in a single hand, then that system “has no constitution at all.”⁷⁸ Following the same logic one may ask what is the point of having a parliament if it is inhibited constitutionally and practically from carrying out its normal functions properly? This argument may be pushed even further to question the value of a government when all the important decisions are made by the monarch and his entourage and when the serious projects are entrusted to independent committees set up by the king himself and subservient to his will. A political system that does not allow for a functioning parliament and a free government able to assume fully its responsibilities, then that system may well be said as having “neither a parliament nor a government.”

For *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* this situation must end and a new constitution is crucial to move away from autocracy. It is regarded the next important step once the pact is concluded and the basic stages of a transitional period have been agreed upon. To the question how to ensure that the new constitution reflects the wishes of the population, Yassine’s answer is that “in contrast to a constitution from on high, we

will have to elect an assembly representing the entire popular spectrum crowning a long public debate. No political entity or independent personality should be excluded.”⁷⁹ It is clear here that Yassine and his group prefer the third method referred to above to make a constitution. They believe that the election of a constituent assembly would provide the conditions for the emergence of a stable political system provided that enough time is given to public debate and the people are encouraged to get involved. Furthermore, Yassine is keen that this free public debate involvement should lead to a document, well-thought and bound to endure and with which the people could identify. Yassine seems to favour a rigid instead of a flexible constitution, as he explains:

To insure that a constitution debated in assembly and submitted to referendum not merely a paper weathervane, an iron-fast juridical body would prevent a call for revisions every time a sudden whim or novel fad tickles imaginations [...] By “iron-fast juridical body” I envision something at the raised level of a parliamentary majority necessary for amending the constitution.⁸⁰

7.4.3 Convoking elections

To say that the Moroccan regime has never made enough effort to hold free and fair elections is an understatement. Fraud has become an art of the state, a mode of governance and the fact that elections in Morocco have always been, and still are, to this date at least, an effective instrument to control the political landscape comes as no surprise. Nothing is left to chance and the regime would do whatever at its disposal to be sure of the desired outcome of any election. What is worthy of note, however, is that though fraud has been a consistent practice since the first general elections held in independent Morocco in 1963, it has not been exercised in the same manner. Whereas in the early elections the authorities intervened overly and sometimes violently to rig the results, in the recent years they have developed more sophisticated ways to keep the whole process under control. It is enough to know, as stated above, that the current electoral system and the way the electoral districts are designed make it impossible for any one political party to win more than about a fourth of the seats in Parliament. Under such circumstances the obstructive interventions of the past have become unnecessary. However, these

methods, though elaborated, have their limits of which the regime is not unaware. One way to deal with those “loopholes” is to simply exclude the political forces which could upset its calculations, and *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* has been subject to this policy since its inception.

For the transition to occur smoothly, the leaders of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* maintain that there must be some guarantees in order to hold free and fair elections. All the actors concerned, as an expert in transitology would put it, should “agree to compete in such a way that those who can win greater electoral support will exercise political superiority in such a way as not to impede those who may win greater support in the future from taking office; and those who lose in the present agree to respect the contingent authority of the winners to make binding decisions, in exchange for being allowed to take office and make decisions in the future.”⁸¹ The leaders of the movement support this idea and all the more so because of the scepticism voiced by some secularists about the Islamists’ intentions. A classical allegation, referred to above, is that if they ever had the opportunity, they would make it “one man, one vote, one time”. *Al-Adl wal-Ihsan* has repeatedly stressed its commitment to respect the people’s choice.⁸² The argument they often advance in this regard is that it is nowadays inconceivable to build a viable political system through force and overcome the daunting challenges of development. Unless a legitimate government is established and endorsed strongly by the people, it cannot be expected to hold for long, much less to cope with the current crises and the tragedies bequeathed from the past. “We are not very enthusiastic,” says one senior member of the movement, “to set up a political order that is doomed to fail. What’s the use?”⁸³

Once all the guarantees that no political force will try to monopolize power against the people’s consent have been made and an agreement on the type of electoral system and on the size and number of constituencies and other related issues have been reached, to hold a free and transparent elections remains a central moment in the transition period. They should be organized, according to *al-Adl wal-*

Ihsan, after the new constitution is approved in order to have a new parliament that will hopefully represent the Moroccan people.

7.4.4 A transition period with a national unity government and a common platform

Morocco is already suffering from various serious crises which are prone to intensify even more under the prevailing conditions. At one point the regime is likely to find itself up against the wall and a bold initiative should prove unavoidable to save the country from absolute breakdown. Then, cooperation would be seen not just as a matter of choice but rather of dire necessity. No political force, as senior members of the movement are never tired of stressing, would have the capacity or the means to cope, on its own, with the heavy inherited legacy.⁸⁴ Even if one party were able to devise an excellent strategy and this strategy had the chance to be implemented, the outcome of such a strategy would not be felt until at least a decade or so has elapsed. Assuming that such a scenario were plausible, the losers in the elections would try to exploit the difficult aftermath of autocratic rule and demonstrate that they have better solutions for the country's problems. Trade unions might find it the appropriate moment to press for their demands which may be hard to satisfy, given the precarious economic and financial situation of the country. Other social and professional sectors might also find it opportune to take to the streets to secure some legitimate gains. Thus, an atmosphere of instability would set in and the promised reforms by the new government would be hard to achieve. The business community might be already sceptical of the competencies of the new government and, fearful of the mounting mood of instability, are likely to respond, as O'Donnell puts it, "with the weapons they have closer at hand: disinvestment and capital flight."⁸⁵ This would indeed jeopardize the whole process and the country would be in serious trouble, to say the least.

To avoid such a scenario, *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* claims that it is in the interest of all that a national unity government be formed on the basis of a common platform,

featuring the most urgent issues about which there is little, if any, disagreement. On the other hand, should a political force, Islamist or secularist, feel that it is strong enough to shoulder the task of change alone and is confident of its success because of the wide popular support, real or imagined, it enjoys, it is most likely to discover shortly, much to its chagrin, that the realities are harsher than it has anticipated. Those who occupy the opposition benches would be in a more comfortable situation, using the easiest available weapon, that is, to criticize and try to put the rod in the wheel to demonstrate the inexperience and incompetence of the new ruling team. For this reason, *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* tirelessly insists on cooperation and consensus building. "We greet such a coming together," remarks the founder of the movement, "with all our heart."⁸⁶ As for the national unity government, whether it is to be set up in the early days of the transition period or after or before the general elections are held is open to discussion. One thing for sure is that *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* seems to endorse the idea in all cases, provided it is based on an agreed common programme.

7.5 A tentative appraisal of the proposed general strategy

It may be a little early to evaluate the non-violent strategy advocated by *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*. Unlike the other two options, discussed in the previous chapter, which were pursued to the end, the strategy adopted by *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* is still operating and seems to be still appealing to large swathes of Moroccan society, at least for the time being. Indeed, some people believe that it is well-crafted and promising, for it has enabled *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* to take root in the Moroccan society without making any concessions to an autocratic regime. Furthermore, the fact that *al-Adl* has chosen to focus on society empowerment and grassroots activities attests to its far-sightedness and a sound awareness of the nature of reform needed in Morocco and what it all entails. Those who want *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* to take part in sham institutions, it is argued, seem to be oblivious of the disastrous consequences resulting from such a course of action. All the opposition parties which have pursued that trajectory have not only failed to achieve anything worthy of mention

but also ruined themselves and tarnished politics for a whole generation of young Moroccans. They have lost their membership, their credibility and squandered their “militant capital” built over years of political engagement.⁸⁷ The worst part of it all, according to these people, is that the chances of their recovering from this downfall are scant if not nonexistent. If rational thinking entails, *inter alia*, considering benefits and costs and learning from the errors of others, then *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* seems remarkable in this respect, for it appears that it has learnt from other Islamic as well as secular organizations inside and outside Morocco. And if, for the sake of argument, the path pursued by *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* is deemed not sure to succeed, the other one to which it is invited is sure to lead to disaster.

The strategy of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* is also lauded for its nonviolent nature. Though the leader of the movement addressed a number of sensitive issues in Morocco like the status of “the Commander of the Faithful”, “the oath of allegiance” and the extravagancies of the monarch in an unprecedented way, he always warned against the use of violence as a means of change.

What is particularly interesting, remarked a senior member of the PJD [Party of Justice and Development], is that the movement of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* has successfully turned to its advantage the injustices it has suffered at the hands of the Moroccan authorities. He added that they, in *Tawhid wal-Islah* [Unity and Reform] and PJD, did not have similar cases, and this, in his view, explains the slow expansion of their movement and the rapid growth of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*.⁸⁸

This positive view, however, is not shared by other people who perceive the choice of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* differently. They argue that the strategy of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* is rather unrealistic and seems to be promoting “the waiting mentality”. Instead of participating in the present institutions whatever their shortcomings or even flaws and trying to press for change, *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* has decided to stay away, apparently until everything is fine before it could join. Things can never be fixed by themselves; someone must intervene to do what is required. By the same token,

the political system in Morocco is never going to improve of its own volition. It is necessary, so goes the argument, to get involved and bring pressure to bear on the government. Not all that is required could be achieved the first day, or the first month or even the first couple of years, but a certain degree of reform, however modest, could be attained. Step by step other spaces could be overtaken until the preferred system of governance is put in place. But “to wait and see” is neither productive nor constructive. It is opting for the easiest alternative, that is, to criticize and nothing else.⁸⁹

Other critics claim that *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* strategy is rather outdated and as such has become irrelevant, to say the least. It is based, according to these critics, on a political outlook formulated by the leader of the movement three decades ago, at a time when the Iranian Revolution was a dominating event. Many felt then that other autocrats in the Arab and Muslim world would follow suit after the downfall of a powerful tyrant like Shah of Iran. The leader of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, it is claimed, is likely to have been influenced by the prevalent political mood of those years and consequently based his strategic vision on the assumption that the collapse of the Moroccan regime was imminent. Now nearly thirty years have elapsed and the monarchy in Morocco is still in place and powerful as ever; yet, *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* has remained stuck in its position. No reconsideration of its attitude seems to have been made in order to adjust its approach to the prevailing reality in the country. If politics is sometimes defined as “the art of the possible”, then *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* would do well if it could modify its strategy, taking into account the current constraints and struggle for the things that are possible.⁹⁰

Other critics still are more poignant in their evaluation. They claim that the major flaw in this strategy is that it is based on irrational thinking and superstition such as the belief in dreams, miracles and myths. One cannot expect a rational approach from those who sanctify their leader, thinking that “obeying the orders of the Sheikh [their leader] becomes the pass for Paradise.”⁹¹ Superstition can never provide a sound basis for a viable strategy. This explains, so goes the argument, why the

movement is unpredictable and the real motives behind its initiatives are hard to fathom. To illustrate this point, proponents of this view raise the case of 20 February movement as an example. It is still unknown, always according to these critics, why *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* joined the 20 February movement from the beginning and participated actively and then all of a sudden it withdrew, at the moment when Morocco was about to enter a new era, if only those uprisings had been maintained. What were the reasons behind its sudden withdrawal? Was it the result of a dream or any other unexplainable motives? Nobody seems to know. One thing for sure is that a valuable opportunity to open a new chapter in the history of Morocco has been stupidly lost and for ever! ⁹²

7.6 Conclusion

For over two decades after Morocco's independence, the two dominant options for seeking comprehensive change were, as explained in the previous chapter, the "revolutionary" and the "reformist" strategies. Proponents of the former wanted to overthrow what was perceived to be an archaic monarchical rule and start from scratch or retain a ceremonial monarchy whereby the monarch reigns but does not rule and then proceed to install the ideal form of government that was in vogue at the time, that is the "socialist system"; those who advocated the latter strategy, whether they sought to set up the same system or favoured a more liberal one, both opted to work from within the monarchical system to achieve their goals. As stated earlier, both strategies did not deliver the expected results. Surprisingly, whereas the former strategy lost much of its initial luster for various internal and external reasons, the latter, despite its utter failure too, still has its supporters from the secularist as well as the Islamist camp. Whether it is out of conviction that it is still considered the only way to achieve change and democracy "by installment", as one author would put it, or out hopelessness and helplessness to coerce a regime, deemed strong and well-protected by its allies at the domestic as well as at the international level, is open to interpretation. The irony, however, is that it seems that both strategies, the "revolutionary" and the "reformist", not only failed to deliver

but also helped to maintain the status quo and at some points even played a decisive role to save the monarchy from serious trouble.

Unlike the proponents of the afore-mentioned strategies, *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* has distinguished itself since its emergence in 1981 by opting for a third way which could be termed “non-violent resistance strategy”. It seeks radical, albeit gradual, change through peaceful means. This formula may sound paradoxical, but since the regime has left no room for any other alternative, it is regarded the only viable option that suits the present circumstances. *Al-Adl wal-Ihsan* is aware that it is not the only political force in the country, though a major one, and is also aware of the efforts needed to rectify decades, if not centuries, of authoritarian rule and corruption. For this reason it insists on consensus building and cooperation. It even puts forward what may be described as a road map to effect peaceful change. This includes the invitation addressed to all political forces to conclude a pact in order to decide on the general principles and orientations to manage the transition peacefully, the election of a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution before convoking general elections to set up a credible and representative parliament. Other ideas which are believed to promote trust and an encouraging environment such as the spirit of cooperation and the importance of national unity government are also considered worthy of discussion. *Al-Adl wal-Ihsan* is keen to remain “a quiet force” able to formulate concrete proposals and not just to oppose and criticize.⁹³

Having said that, it may be too early to say whether the trajectory taken by *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* is going to succeed or not, but so far the movement appears to be still thriving. This does not mean that its choice does not involve any risks. A possible problem, as one author has pointed out, is that it runs the risk “of losing the popularity of its growing constituency,”⁹⁴ if there is no serious change in the near future. It is indeed a challenge not to be undermined. Will *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* stay the course whatever the circumstances and remain coherent as it is now, or finding that the road is too long, will it succumb ultimately to the will of the *makhzenian*

regime? What are the prospects for its success? No definitive answers could be provided at the moment, but one thing for sure is that its overall position, notwithstanding some criticisms, is still appreciated by many Moroccan people and particularly because the recent events in the Arab world seem to confirm much of its analysis. *Al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, however, believes that political action is not enough to achieve the aspired change. The educational issue, as will be seen in the following chapter, is another front which is considered at least as important as the political front.

Chapter 8 Education in the Movement's Struggle for Change

In May 2000 when Sheikh Yassine was allowed to go out after about ten years of house arrest, he held a press conference which was attended by a number of Moroccan and foreign journalists apparently eager to know what the leader of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* had to say now that he regained his freedom and the monarch with whom he had quarrelled for so long -Hassan II- was no more. One journalist asked him about his plans for the following years. Yassine replied succinctly and without hesitation: “*At-tarbiya*, then *at-tarbiya* and then *at-tarbiya*” [Education, then education and then education]¹. Probably this is not the answer that the journalist expected, but Yassine merely made a point he had already emphasized on many occasions. Just about two years earlier he wrote in one of his French books, *islamiser la modernité, “L’éducation est notre métier.”* [“Education is our profession.”]² In fact, in all his writings and speeches the major theme which he comes to frequently and tackles from various angles is the issue of what is broadly, for lack of a better word, translated here as “education”. In a book, which he also wrote in French in 1979, *La révolution à l’heure de l’Islam*, he considers education as one of the two major fronts in the struggle for comprehensive social and political change.³ With the same enthusiasm and energy he continued to underline the crucial importance of education in his speeches and in whatever he wrote until he passed away on Thursday, 13th December 2012.

Yassine was certainly not the only Muslim scholar or thinker who placed a high emphasis on education; others have done the same.⁴ However, the way education is expounded in his writings and adopted by his movement as a tool to build the character of human being, aware of their full rights, duties and responsibilities and to supply them, as he says, with “an attitude, a vision, a will that soars beyond historical contingencies and surpasses the narrow frontiers of geography,”⁵ seems to be a distinct feature of his project. If the previous chapter tackled the issue of

political action in the strategy of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* and what was suggested to secure a peaceful transition, this chapter focuses on education. It will try to find out about the importance, the basis and the main characteristics of the kind of education advocated by Yassine and his group, the required conditions for it to bear the expected results, and some of the tools used to promote its aims. Thus, it would become, hopefully, clear how it is integrated into the movement's strategy to press for social and political reform.

8.1 On the importance of education

Before we get too far in our discussion, some clarifications need to be made. The theme of education on which this chapter focuses will be considered from an Islamic perspective which differs from the secular one. Thus, the word education used here covers at least two basic Arab terms: *at-tarbiya* which refers to the moral and spiritual dimension according the Islamic teachings, and *at-ta'lim* which denotes knowledge and learning. In an Islamic context, the concept of education would refer to a comprehensive system, based on the Islamic principles and involving all the dimensions of the human being, moral, spiritual, intellectual, physical,... with the aim of enabling them to achieve a high level of excellence and happiness in this life and the next.⁶ Other definitions may be encountered, but though there may be differences in wording, the basic idea is generally agreed upon. However, if there is not much difference in theory, views tend to diverge and sometimes widely in practice, particularly on the way to achieve a well-balanced form of education, widely believed to be the "secret" of the success of the early Islamic community founded by Prophet Muhammad.

Since its inception, *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* has placed a high premium on education to the extent that in certain accounts it has been considered, if not dismissed as, a simple Sufi order in the garb of a modern Islamic movement.⁷ For *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, the emphasis on education is rather due to its conviction that this aspect has been glaringly neglected, in practice, though not necessarily in theory, by most Islamic

movements. Even those who are aware of its importance may be at a loss when it comes to the process of achieving the objectives of education. They often find themselves between two options neither of which appeals to those concerned with the current condition of the Islamic *Umma* which is far from enviable: the Sufi and legalistic options.⁸ In the former case spirituality is usually accompanied by withdrawal from the social and political affairs of society; in the latter, by insisting too much on the “rules” at the expense of God’s love, an austere version of Islam is being offered and sometimes also accompanied by obedient submission to the corrupt ruling elite. *Al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, as noted in Chapter 4, advocates what it believes to be the “golden mean” which tries to avoid the extremes and weaknesses of both tendencies by emulating, as it claims, the model of the Prophet and his Companions.

In all his publications, which exceed forty books of various sizes, as well as in his speeches, Sheikh Yassine insists on moral and spiritual education and even contends that many of the problems and failures experienced by the contemporary Islamic movements are largely due to the neglect of this crucial aspect of Islam. Whereas some people may think it is a private matter and every Muslim is normally expected to give it due consideration, Yassine has a different view. He believes that it should be given priority and should not be left to the discretion of the members of a movement engaged in the hard struggle to overcome the prevailing lamentable conditions and contribute to the establishment of a new political order. This does not mean imposing on the members some practices in order to boost their moral and spiritual fibre, but rather encouraging them to take care of their hearts and souls as they do with their minds and bodies. This sounds easier said than done, and it would be interesting to find out what the movement suggests in this respect. However, let us first examine the rationale and the basis of the proposed model, claimed to make the achievement of such daunting objectives possible.

8.2 Education and the Prophetic method

How to acquire *iman* [faith] and achieve spiritual completeness? It is a question upon which a lot has been said and written and the debate is still open and is not likely to end any time soon. Though Muslim scholars agree about the full meaning of faith and the necessity to take practical measures not only to get the feel of it but also to sustain and improve it, they tend to disagree about the ways and conditions for acquiring a higher level, able to lead to the efflorescence of the believer's personality, much in the same way as it occurred with the first Islamic community at the time of the Prophet. Dissatisfied with a prevailing form of Islam sapped of its spiritual warmth and vigour, Yassine pondered this question for years during which he engaged in an in-depth study culminating in a Sufi experience which lasted about six years. When he refers to this phase of his life, it is usually to make a point that the answer he provides is not rash or speculative but rather well-thought; it is based not only on authentic Islamic texts but also on his personal experience and buttressed by testimonies of scholars of high calibre like Imam al-Ghazali, AbdelKader al-Jilani, al'Izz ibn Abdessalam and others, some of whose experiences he discusses in his books, namely *Al-Ihsan*.⁹

What makes Yassine's experience different, however, is that it tries to reconcile between what he calls "the individual and the collective salvation" and "the spiritual goal" and "the historical action in the world". Whereas some people are only concerned with their own spiritual well-being and stay away from the affairs of society, Yassine's concern is to devise a model that allows for moral and spiritual accomplishment as well as social and political engagement. Both objectives are, in Yassine's view, integrated into the model set by the Prophet and there is no reason why they should be separated.

The reality, however, is that the divide did take place and its early symptoms could be identified since the overthrow of the Islamic Caliphate and the usurpation of power by the successive dynasties which have been in control of most Muslim

territory to this day. Though the Islamic *Umma* has survived despite the severe blows it has endured since then, the moral, spiritual and intellectual coherence that existed during the time of the Prophet and his early Companions was deeply affected. According to Yassine's analysis this accounts largely for the emergence of various competing and sometimes conflicting tendencies in the Muslim history. Some focussed on the *hadith* and its sciences, some on Islamic jurisprudence, some engaged in what was to be called later asceticism and Sufism whereas others picked up other disciplines. The phenomenon being described here does not reflect a natural development towards specialization so much as an outcome of intellectual disintegration. The common feature between these groups, however, is that, apart from a few voices which did rise against injustice and tyranny and paid the price dearly, the rest generally stayed away from political and constitutional issues; and those who did get involved in some theoretical debate, they were very cautious not to trigger the wrath of the incumbent rulers. These developments eventually led to the outright marginalization of the scholars of Islam. The great challenge now, argues Yassine, is to bring the constituents of Islam together in order to overcome the political disorder and the intellectual disintegration and rediscover the unity of Muslims and the greatness of Islam.¹⁰

It is in this perspective that the model suggested by Yassine to reform the individual, society and government should be understood. In Yassine's opinion a comprehensive reform requires a comprehensive view that integrates the moral, spiritual and the rational into a project able to secure the well-being of the individual in a sound socio-political environment. It does not make sense, to his understanding, to search for spiritual elevation and ignore the realities on the ground. The two objectives are not mutually exclusive and there is no reason why they should not be both targeted, especially when there is ample evidence that the reconciliation is not only possible but necessary and has indeed occurred.

Yassine's model is based on a Prophetic text which reads: "*Iman* [faith] consists of over seventy branches, the best of which is the declaration that there is no god but

God, and the least of which is the removal of harmful objects from the road, and modesty is a branch of *iman*.”¹¹ This definition, however, only sets the general framework but does not mention all the seventy branches that make faith reach its highest standards. Only three are cited and the rest are to be gleaned from the corpus of the Prophet’s *Sunnah*. This probably prompted an eminent scholar, Imam al-Bayhaqi (384 – 458 H), to collect the seventy plus branches in a single volume titled, *Shu’ab al-Iman* [Branches of Faith]. Others have followed suit though they slightly differ, for good reason, from one another on the number, the manner and the sets into which they are classified. This is just a matter of trying to arrange them in an appropriate way and does not affect what faith basically means and entails.

In the same vein but from a perspective that takes into account the need for comprehensive revival and reform of Muslim societies, Sheikh Yassine bases the proposed model of education on the Prophetic text just cited and arranges the seventy-seven branches into ten compartments, each of which highlights a major virtue. Thus, the first virtue is called *as-suhba wa al-jama’a* [companionship and community] and describes the general environment where brotherly relationships and enduring bonds between Muslims could develop. The second virtue, *dhikr* [remembrance of God], refers to a core requirement for the moral and spiritual development of the individual as well as of the community. The third which is called *sidq* [sincerity] implies the provision of concrete services to prove the quality of one’s faith and the extent to which one is willing to get involved. This branch and the two mentioned previously are considered crucial components of the proposed model and, as it will be seen later, also conditions for its success.

The remaining seven virtues are applications of the first three mentioned above. Thus, *albadl* [giving and sacrifice] comes fourth to indicate that a true commitment requires, among other things, giving, making sacrifices and getting involved constantly in the efforts to set up an Islamic social and political order. The fifth virtue called *al’ilm* [knowledge] is regarded as the torch that lights the way to follow.

The distinction is made between two types of knowledge: one type is incumbent upon every Muslim, for it shows and encourages them to take the way leading to God's pleasure; the other type is *fard kifaya* [sufficiency duty] and falls under the responsibility of the whole *Umma* to acquire all the necessary sciences and technologies to serve the needs of the Muslim people. The sixth is *al-'amal* [action] and connotes not only the acquisition of the necessary skills and the appropriate attitude to be a positive and functioning member of the community but also continuous mobilization of the people to build up and sustain the aspired Muslim society. The seventh, called *samt* [behaviour], means that the Muslim society should develop its distinct and appealing aspects and be a model worthy of respect and emulation. The eighth is *at-tu`ada* [moderation and discipline] and it involves the ability to endure hardships in the way of change, rejecting violence and rashness as means of achieving any legitimate aims. The ninth, *al-iqtisad* [economy], entails the emergence of a new generation which rejects the consumerist mentality and, with the intention to please God, partakes in the creation of a robust, healthy and growing economy. The final virtue is called *al-jihad*. The implication of the order here is that after acquiring the qualities of what is perceived to be good character, in all its dimensions, there comes the wider realm of execution, which the term *jihad* connotes. Besides the continuous striving to dominate one's ego, the committed Muslim is also invited to work for the establishment of an Islamic order which cannot be achieved unless the individual is educated, trained and mobilized along a model into which all the branches of faith are integrated. This is what Sheikh Yassine has tried to do in what he calls "*Al-minhaj an-Nabawi*" [the Prophetic method].¹²

8.3 Characteristics of the required education

8.3.1 The need for balance

Three tendencies, in the view of the leader of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, should be shunned in order to allow for a well-balanced education able to effect "a fundamental

change in the human being, to provide him with a strong will [...] and liberate his mind.”¹³ He refers to the first tendency as “the intellectual or cultural Islam”. It should be noted here that though Yassine does not like to use “Islam” with “adjectives” (political Islam, modern Islam, conservative Islam, ...), it seems that he cannot help resorting to the same practice from time to time to illustrate his point. By “intellectual Islam” he means the inclination of some Muslim activists to focus mainly on the world of ideas, concepts and the various intellectual, philosophical and ideological currents at the expense of other equally important concerns. In a book titled *Hiwar ma’a al-Fudal’ ad-Dimocratiyin* [Dialogue with the Honourable Democrats], he writes:

Many of our Islamist brothers tend to place a higher emphasis on intellectual training and issues of revival. Though we do not argue about the importance of these concerns, it is not the education we are seeking. What we are seeking is a comprehensive and in-depth education of man’s heart and ego in the first place before his intellect, bodily senses and organizational and activist skills.¹⁴

The second tendency which, in Yassine’s view, should also be discouraged is termed “the ascetic or Sufi Islam”. This should come as a big surprise from someone who had himself lived a Sufi experience and of which he was not ashamed. On the contrary, he acknowledged its impact on his personality in the clearest way possible and on numerous occasions. “All I am,” he writes in one of his books, “I owe to my Sufi masters.”¹⁵ If the Sufi merits are appreciated and extolled to such an extent, why is he then critical of their current political stance? Does it not sound paradoxical?

In Yassine’s view, his argument is quite clear and he sees no contradiction in his position. The fact that he believes that the Sufis, the true ones, have preserved “the secret” of what is sometimes described as “the major struggle” does not mean that their model is beyond reproach. The only model that qualifies as such and that should be emulated is the one set by the Prophet. In light of this he thinks that given the serious circumstances the Islamic *Umma* is undergoing, there is no excuse whatsoever for anyone, including the Sufis, to flee the social and political arena and not get involved.¹⁶ “What excuse could there be,” he wonders, “for those

adopting a neutral position towards the systemic invasion of our countries and minds?”¹⁷ Even Sufis themselves, argues Yassine, have not historically always favoured isolation and withdrawal from the affairs of society. Indeed there are scores of historical incidents showing them in the forefront in the defence of the Muslim territory, and there is no reason why they should not do the same now. The reasons for getting engaged in the present time are more compelling, now that the Islamic *Umma* is being exposed to the most serious challenges it has ever had to face throughout its whole history.

The third tendency which Yassine warns against is termed “the activist Islam”. It is characterized by over-enthusiasm and engagement in so many activities to the point of neglecting other necessary duties, including even some obligatory acts of worship. Such an attitude, contends Yassine, does not reflect a sound understanding of the principles of Islam and its spirit and, what is worse, it could have detrimental consequences. Yassine goes on even to state that “the most serious educational and organizational damage often stems from the over-enthusiasm of a hasty new comer and the elation of an activist who dissipate their energy in moments of overexcitement which soon subside.”¹⁸

These forms of Islam are considered the “three pitfalls”¹⁹ that the Islamic movement must avoid in order to acquit itself well and advance successfully on the right track towards the desired change.

8.3.2 Gradualism

Gradualism refers to the principle or policy of seeking some goal gradually rather than quickly or violently. As Yassine sees it, if this principle seems to be highly recommended in politics, the same is also true in the field of education. The reason is that education has for its object the formation of character and the attempt to influence the behaviour and attitude of an individual with a particular past, different aptitudes and belonging to a certain social milieu and accustomed to certain habits, and here lies the complexity of the issue of education. Therefore, to deal with the

human subject requires a great deal of patience, flexibility and wisdom. It requires, adds Yassine, the use of a variety of styles of influencing, including mixing up with people in their homes and workplaces, travelling with them, sharing their joys and sorrows.²⁰

Yassine underlines the importance of the time factor in the success of education. People differ in temperament and character and it may take some of them some time before they mature or respond. There is no fast guide to deliver immediate results. Furthermore, quoting an old adage which says “it is much easier to move mountains than to change habits”, Yassine points out that the more people get older, the more difficult it becomes for them to alter their accustomed behaviour. Hence, it is important to allow sufficient time for the educational efforts to bear fruit and the change to occur smoothly.

It is worthy of note that Yassine here is merely stressing an Islamic principle which is dealt with extensively in *Shari'ah* books. On its importance 'Aisha, the Prophet's wife is reported to have said that when the Quranic revelations began, the first verses to be communicated were those which mentioned hell and heaven. It was not until fifteen years later, when people's hearts had softened, that specific commands to desist from fornication and drinking wine were revealed in the Quran. 'Aisha pointed out that if these commands had been revealed in the beginning, the Arabs would have stoutly refused to give up fornication and wine drinking.²¹

To illustrate how the principle of gradualism was put into practice in the early years of Islam, one of the oft-cited examples concerns the prohibition of alcohol and gambling. In the beginning, neither was explicitly banned but it was understood from what was revealed then that their negative effects were greater than their benefits. Later, new verses came to announce that drinking alcohol should be avoided during praying, and in the third stage other verses were revealed to declare that intoxicants and gambling were absolutely and definitely prohibited. It was a psychological and gradual treatment of some deeply entrenched habits in

the Arabian society like gambling and drinking alcohol. On the basis of this method, the principle of gradualism is highly recommended where change cannot be implemented quickly or at one go, as in politics, education and the like spheres.

8.3.3 Continuity

Continuity is another feature of the form of education advocated by Yassine and his group. It is continuous and inclusive in the sense that it does not exclude any age, nor is it confined to new members only, nor does it stop at a certain stage in the life of the individual. Education is a must in the life of the individual at all times and in all places. No one can claim that he is “well-educated”, that he has had enough training or that he has got a stronger faith than the others. Education, like knowledge, is from the cradle to the grave, as the saying goes. “We should never give up,” asserts Yassine, “correcting and improving ourselves. If at any moment we think that we have perfected ourselves, we can be sure we are wrong, and to entertain such a feeling would mean that we have regressed and succumbed to hubris and frivolity.”²²

According to this logic, all individuals, regardless of age, gender, race, ability, qualifications, professions and social strata should be concerned with the need for continued improvement and view education as a lifetime experience. It is no wonder, then, that we find, as will be seen later, that *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* regularly organize some meetings which are accessible to all members, young and old, from the simple cleaner to the highly qualified engineer, to cultivate the feeling of brotherhood and humility. “There is no claim of merit,” as the Prophet says, “of an Arab over a non-Arab, or of a white over a black person, or of a male over a female. Only God-fearing people merit a preference with God.”²³ And since only God can judge who is more God-fearing than whom, and given that the person’s faith may go through ups and downs, no one can claim he is better off in terms of moral and spiritual achievement than the others. It is true that some people can say from a person’s behaviour and deeds that he is, for instance, a hard worker or

honest or trustworthy but from an Islamic point of view they cannot say for sure who has a stronger faith or a purer heart. Hence it is necessary to stay humble, modest and to commit oneself to continuous improvement.

8.4 Conditions of education

On the basis of this analysis, Yassine sets three conditions for the required education to yield the expected results: *as-suhba wal-jama'a* [companionship and community], *dhikr* [remembrance of God] and *sidq* [sincerity]. Let us take up each in turn.

8.4.1 Companionship and community

The first step for the success of education according to the model proposed by Sheikh Yassine lies in the existence of spiritual companionship and a community of believers able to provide a warm and encouraging environment to facilitate the full integration of “the new comer”.²⁴ The term “companionship”, used here to translate the Arabic word “*as-suhba*”, goes beyond usual friendship and entails having a spiritual guide or, to use Islamic terminology, “Skeikh”, “Waliuallah” [a holy person] or “Arif bi Allah” [literally, a knower of God], who, in the view of Yassine and his like-minded scholars, is the cornerstone in the journey on the path to God.²⁵ It is the first step and not an easy one, given the widespread misconceptions that surround this issue. It is not surprising that Yassine repeatedly refers in his writings to this tense atmosphere where it may be hard for the uninformed to differentiate between facts and fiction, truth and superstition, and reality and rumours. He advises that unless one is deeply concerned and eager to know, one may not go far, and in what looks like a psychological motivating push, he states:

The first step towards God is costly: if you can't pay the price, don't ask me to offer you a discount. If you don't face forward and strike out towards your goal without worrying about prejudice and suffering, bewail your insignificance and content yourself with an infantile sort of life, wan and without history.²⁶

Yassine here points out to some of the socio-psychological obstacles that are likely to emerge in the quest for *iman* [faith] and *ihsan*. Pressure, spoken and unspoken,

may come from peers, family members, close friends or simply from the internal resistance that one may experience towards modifying one's pattern of life. An education expert by profession and well acquainted with socio-psychological studies in addition to his personal experience, Yassine tries to alert his audience in advance of the possible hindrances they may encounter to undertake what he believes to be not only a rewarding experience but more importantly an existential need. Once the initial hesitation that usually precedes any serious undertaking in one's life is surmounted, there comes the essential step which Yassine describes as follows:

Once the solitary test of detachment is passed, you'll have to seek an encounter: you'll need to go to another companion and there make a place for yourself. You will need to adapt yourself to another environment and be adopted. Nothing will take the place of a meeting of a spiritual companionship. Companionship is one of the most essential notions of Islam; in the path of the penitent, God often places persons with pure and limpid hearts.²⁷

Yassine is not unaware that the marketplace is full of those who claim they can assist in spiritual improvement. Many may be pure liars, magicians or, as he describes them, "charlatans" and "mercenaries"²⁸. He consequently advises that one has to be cautious. The question that arises here is how to distinguish between the true and false spiritual companionship. In Yassine's view the answer is quite simple and it is enough to apply the *Shari'ah* criteria to know where you are standing. If one finds himself in an environment where *Shari'ah* is not respected and is deliberately contravened, then he must be certain that he is in the wrong place and has to leave immediately. It is important, asserts Yassine, to be sure that one is in good hands.

Although the suitable companionship is considered the first step in the right direction, there are other factors, argues Yassine, that come into play in the pursuit of moral and spiritual completeness, namely the importance of the personal efforts to dominate one's ego and improve one's character. The implication here is that one should not despair if he finds that he lacks certain aptitudes. Though to be of good character is said to depend on the innate features, the educative role of what

is acquired is, in his opinion, of great value, especially if it is aided by a supportive environment.²⁹

A final point that needs to be made concerns the relationship between companionship and community. Why are the two concepts joined to form the first of the ten virtues that make the core of what is called the Prophetic model to seek comprehensive reform? Actually, Yassine is keen that the two concepts be brought together to cultivate the feeling of an indissociable unit. He does not want his movement to slip into the old Sufi pattern and focus on moral and spiritual concerns only or to be overtaken by a hollow form of activism. Neither option, according to his model, would do to face the present and future challenges, let alone playing a decisive role in the renewal of Islam, the reconstruction of society and the establishment of a just government. “There is no liberation,” he asserts, “without struggle, and no struggle without organization, and no organization without a system of leadership, and nothing of value can be expected from the whole organization without “*tarbiya*” [education].³⁰

It follows that tying in companionship with community is not seen just as an option among others, but rather the only viable way for Muslims to achieve true liberation, justice, dignity, democracy and a respected place in the world community. Yassine is careful that his position is supported by authentic Islamic texts from the Quran and the *Sunna* of the Prophet like the following passage in which the Quran says:

The believers who stay at home –apart from those that suffer from grave impediment– are not equal to those who strive in the way of God with their wealth and lives. God has conferred on those who strive with their wealth and lives a higher rank than those who stay at home. He has promised all a good reward; but far richer is the recompense of those who strive for Him: rank of his own bestowal, forgiveness, and mercy. God is forgiving and merciful.³¹

From this passage and many others to the same effect, abundantly quoted in his writings, Yassine, like many Muslim thinkers, gathers that the required Islamic position at the present time entails a struggle “which joins faith and action in the world.”³²

8.4.2 *Dhikr* [Remembrance of God]

The second important condition for a sound, effective education according to Yassine has to do with an Islamic practice called “*dhikr*” [remembrance of God]. The concept *dhikr* may refer to a restricted or a broad sense. When used in the narrower sense, it refers to the practice of uttering some phrases and formulas recommended by the Prophet as one way to remember God. Some formulas are advised to be reiterated at specific times of day or night or in certain places and circumstances; others are encouraged to be said at any time, with no specific limit. However, when the term is used in the broader meaning, it covers a wide range of devotional acts some of which may be obligatory [*fard*] like the five daily prayers whereas others may be supererogatory or voluntary like recitation of the Quran, reiteration of certain prayers, attending gatherings for knowledge and admonition and many more.

Sheikh Yassine uses the term *dhikr* in both meanings and, like many scholars, places a high emphasis on its importance. He describes it as “a divine chemistry and a purifying remedy of the hearts; it is the confluence of the affluents of faith and the source of its light.”³³ His belief that it is the most effective means to renew faith in the hearts takes into account a Prophet’s recommendation which reads: “Faith wears out in the heart of any one of you just as clothes wear out, so ask God to renew the faith in your hearts.”³⁴ It is clear from this *hadith* as well as other Islamic texts that faith is not static but rather dynamic. Its increase or decrease is correlated to the presence or absence of certain factors. Hence, it is important to make a constant effort to keep on ascending the path to God.

To maintain that effort and stay determined, Yassine believes that the second important factor is to get engaged in some devotional exercises; some divine phrases, particularly “*la ilaha illa allah*” [there is no god but God] should be practised abundantly. Yassine argues that he is not making a simple point of view which could be easily challenged but rather following an explicit recommendation

made by the Prophet himself who is reported to have invited his Companions to revive their faith; and when they asked, “How can we revive our faith, O, Messenger of God?” he said, “Repeat this phrase frequently and abundantly: there is no god but God.”³⁵ To make his case, Yassine alludes to various pieces of evidence from the major sources of Islam and quotes many outstanding scholars.

It is not our concern here to support or refute his position or that of his critics. What should be noted, however, is that Yassine has made a great intellectual effort, as his corpus shows, to demonstrate that his model, despite being *ijtihad* in design, a proposal of his own, is based on, and supported by authentic texts and scholars of repute. In various statements he implicitly and explicitly points that with regard to this particular issue, that is, the safe way to God, he speaks about something he knows and he has lived and is not just speculating.

Some people may argue that Yassine’s model is reminiscent of the Sufi practice and from this they infer that Yassine has never overcome, or recover from, his past Sufism, despite claims to the contrary. Sheikh Yassine, however, maintains that if Sufis observe this practice (of remembering God), it does not make sense that it should be ignored in order not to be identified with them. The real question that should be asked: is it allowed by Islamic teachings or not? If it is, then it is the Prophet that is being followed and not the Sufis. Furthermore, his model cannot be confounded with the Sufis’ for a simple, obvious reason: whereas “our brother Sufis”, as he would address them in recognition of the precious element they have preserved, seek to reform themselves only, he and his group are concerned with reforming themselves, society and the political system; and this, in his view, is the emulation of the *Sunna* of the Prophet in its entirety.³⁶

8.4.3 *Sidq* [Sincerity]

Sincerity is the third condition for the education, as understood by Yassine and his group, to have its positive intended effects. Sincerity is a condition and, at the same time, a criterion to gauge to what extent a person is earnest in his quest for

moral and spiritual fulfilment and also in his social and political commitment. Thus, Yassine advises that one should first make sure that he is really serious about his quest before going further. "One must first take the time," he says "to meditate and be assured that this vocation... that is, a calling from the heart, is not simply a fantasy."³⁷ Once he is sure of himself and is determined to go all the way, he should be prepared for "the jeers and the taunts"³⁸ of friends and relatives to deter him from his goal. Yassine is probably thinking here of what he himself had to endure when he joined the *Butshishi Sufi* order and how peers and relatives derided him and went even to spread the rumours that the man had gone mad. As he knows from experience that "abandoning disturbing friendships is not an easy matter," he advises those concerned to persevere and not be deterred. They have to brace themselves to overcome these barriers and "bear up without violence under annoyance and real harm, look straight ahead, without taking refuge in evasive attitudes for fear of being demonized or slashed to pieces."³⁹

Then Yassine cites some aspects which he believes contradict sincerity and what it all entails. They are briefly as follows:

1/ hypocrisy and its branches, the major manifestations of which are mentioned in the following Prophetic saying: "Three traits whoever possesses them is a hypocrite and whoever possesses some of them has an element of hypocrisy until he leaves it: the one who when he speaks he lies, when he makes a promise he breaks it, and when he is entrusted he betrays his trust,"⁴⁰

2/ adherence to inherited traditions, mentalities and egoistic attitudes which are alien to the principles and spirit of Islam;

3/ adherence to the inherited Islam and the bygone creedal disputes which, in addition to other social and political ills, have had adverse effects on the situation of the Muslims and on the endeavours to bring them together to meet the various challenges;

4/ approbation of the illusions and superstitions which are widespread among the deprived, poor people and which, indirectly and sometimes overtly, are encouraged to keep large swathes of society in ignorance and mediocrity;

5/ approbation of the half-solutions of the aspired objectives, seemingly in the name of pragmatic realism or gradualism; the reality is that this attitude often conceals the intention of total submission to the corrupt ruling elite and has nothing to do with the principle of gradualism which remains valid to achieve comprehensive reform;

6/ seeking to swell numbers by indiscriminate recruitment, that is, without screening and selecting the right elements for the movement's membership: this practice which prioritizes quantity at the expense of quality has caused a lot of damage and even outright failures to certain Islamic groups; the members of the group should be alert and if someone should display a fundamental flaw which cannot be corrected, there is no need to keep them;

7/ a last but not least aspect is that there should be no ambiguity about the individuals' intention and support of the thought of the movement and their acceptance of its style, organization and political line.⁴¹

Such were the three conditions of the form of education as envisioned by Sheikh Yassine. Each represents a cardinal component of the process: one relates to the "educator and the environment"; the second to the core of the "curriculum" [*dhikr* in its broad sense, deemed essential for the revival of faith]; and the third has to do with the "educatee" who should be disposed and willing to get involved.⁴² The question that arises now and to which we turn in the following section is to see what practical means used to translate the suggested model into visible reality.

8.5 Tools of education

Sheikh Yassine is of the view that moral and spiritual flourishing is not achieved by reading books or listening to religious lectures and moral speeches or by attending

intellectual debates despite the importance of all these things, but rather by positive action and effective practical measures. Yassine finds that the discourse of many Muslim thinkers regarding this point to be rather broad and vague and does not deal with the pertinent question that many young Muslims ask: how to cope with the spiritual hollowness which has overtaken the young Muslim generation? And even when they do tackle this question, they do not provide a practical answer. Some thinkers may excel in the description of the greatness of Islam, the benefits of faith and the importance of Muslim contributions to human civilization. They may also be creative in speaking about the need to revive Islam in the hearts and minds of the Muslim people. However, they stop short at delineating clearly and in practical terms how to acquire this renewal and thereby fulfil the spiritual needs of many young Muslims.

In dealing with this issue, Sheikh Yassine focussed on the know-how more than anything else, and here, in the view of this author, lies one of the strengths of the movement. Instead of long speeches or heated discussions about the necessity to take the question of faith seriously, he proposes a simple, practical programme of which some exercises are daily, some are weekly and some are monthly whereas others are spread over the year, depending on the members' time and circumstances. Broadly speaking, this programme may be divided into two parts: the first consists of the individual exercises and the second of those that should be carried out collectively or in small groups. Let's examine the first type, subtitled "the day and night of the believer".

8.5.1 The believer's day and night programme

In Yassine's view it is important for the Muslim to have signposts on his journey through life in order not to wander haphazardly or waste energy for no good purpose. He should know how to allocate his time and effort to fulfil his obligations and get deeply involved in what really counts and not in trifles; and whatever his work, profession or commitments, nothing should deter him from performing his

daily prayers on time and, as far as possible, in congregation.⁴³ A certain balance between the spiritual, the cultural and social and political activism has to be maintained in order to develop a balanced personality able to partake in *da'wah* work as well as in the struggle for comprehensive reform. To help him in this respect, Yassine proposes an eight-point daily programme which will be summarized as follows:

1. The believer should wake up every day before *al-Fajr* [the dawn] prayer, an hour or so, to perform the “night prayer”, often referred to as the Prophetic “*witr*” and sit down for a few minutes to pray to God for forgiveness. If one cannot get up before the dawn prayer, or he is not sure to get up early enough, it would be better for him to do the “night prayer” before going to bed, though doing it before the dawn is best.
2. To remain seated in one’s place after the dawn prayer and get engaged in *dhikr* [remembrance of God] is a practice recommended by the Prophet. Yassine points out that it is a blessed time and could be devoted to remembrance of God, Quran recital and rehearsal or knowledge acquisition. Two chapters of the Quran should be read every day.
3. Besides the obligatory prayers, the believer is strongly encouraged to undertake as many supererogatory and voluntary acts of worship as he can. These include the praying accompanying the compulsory five daily prayers, the fore-noon prayer [*duha*], the congregations of the Islamic *Eids* and all the voluntary services that one may like to conduct at any time of the day or night.
4. At least three sessions of 15 minutes each [or one session of 45 minutes] should be devoted to reiterating the “blessed statement”: there is no god but God; one should try to keep the mind and heart concentrated on, and attentive to, God’s Greatness and Grandeur. It should be noted here that this practice has always been a controversial point. It is approved by some

and rejected by others. In the view of Yassine and his like-minded, the benefits of this phrase are beyond imagination, and it is enough to know that it is recommended by the Prophet. However, Yassine advises that in order for this practice to bear fruit, one should fully yield to its logic. “If God is my sole Sovereign, argues Yassine, “it follows that me, his servant, I have to assume his law and struggle with all my energy for his cause.”⁴⁴ If, on the other hand, the repetition of the said formula, considered the highest affluent of faith, only fosters a penchant for isolation and a form of contemplative improvement, then the essential objective is missing, that is, to promote the emergence of a committed believer willing to strive for the well-being of all and not just for his own goals, however noble these may be.⁴⁵

5. To cultivate love for the Prophet entails, among other things, sending abundant blessings and greetings on him every day and especially on Thursday night and Friday. It is a practice that is highly encouraged, and it is up to every one to find the suitable time to carry it out daily.
6. Before going to sleep, the believer should call himself to account as to how he has spent his day. He should renew his repentance and invoke God to open for him all the avenues to strive in his way and win his pleasure.
7. For those who are students, they should invest the effort and time needed for their study. Their first duty after prayer, recitation of the Quran, God’s remembrance and the acquisition of the minimum share of Islamic knowledge is to succeed and excel in their studies.
8. The believer should set some time to make some contribution, however modest, for the benefit of “*da’wa*” [the call to Islam] such as assisting someone in need, implementing a task requested by the movement or seeking or imparting knowledge... It is important, stresses Yassine, that the believer should not waste his time in idleness and heedlessness or in trivialities, nor should he waste the time of others by long visits and lack of

punctuality. Time should be managed like a budget; it should be carefully planned and intelligently spent.⁴⁶

8.5.2 Collective training sessions⁴⁷

In addition to the individual programme, Sheikh Yassine proposes a number of collective sessions which the members of the movement are invited to attend as far as they can. The importance of these gatherings lies in the fact that the participants are isolated for a while from the hustle and bustle of daily life, weaned, as it were, from their habituated customs and brought to concentrate on their aspired spiritual goals. These gatherings also provide the participants with an opportunity to learn from each other, strengthen their relationship and bridge whatever psychological gap there may be between generations and social strata.

Furthermore, acts of worship are more efficient and beneficial when accomplished together. This would allow hearts imbued with deep piety to exert a positive effect on those that may be in a poor condition. One becomes more courageous in the company of brave people; even the psychic problems disappear in such a warm and loving atmosphere.⁴⁸ It is no wonder, remarks Yassine, that these gatherings were, at the time of the Prophet, “recognized for their boosting effects on the people’s virtues.”⁴⁹ Convinced of their importance and impact, the movement of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* organizes various meetings, and for the sake of brevity only some of them will be mentioned here.

8.5.2.1 *I'tikaf* [Spiritual retreat]

The literal meaning of the word *I'tikaf* in Arabic is to stick exclusively to something, whether it is good or bad. However, in Islamic terminology it means to stay in a mosque for a particular period of time with the intention of worshipping God and seeking his propinquity. It is a practice that the Prophet observed regularly in the last ten days of every Ramadan till the end of his life. Thus, there is no disagreement among scholars of Islam about its legitimacy.⁵⁰ Given its perceived

spiritual benefits, every Ramadan *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* organizes this spiritual event wherever it happens to be operating and have members, and attendance is strongly encouraged. Those who cannot afford the last ten days of Ramadan can go for a shorter period.⁵¹

A major obstacle, however, to doing *I'tikaf* nowadays is related to the place where it should normally be held: the mosque. Since Morocco regained its independence in 1956, the mosque has been placed under an increasing control to such an extent that it is only opened for the five daily obligatory prayers and is closed immediately after each prayer. At the time of the Prophet and even until recently, the mosque used to open all day and played a pivotal role in the life of Muslims. It was not only a place of worship but served multiple purposes. It used to be a place of learning and, to use the words of one author, “a hub of ebullient and purposeful activity.”⁵² It was customary to find there several “study circles”, each of which was led by a scholar who would focus on a specific field of knowledge: the Quran, its memorization and proper pronunciation, the Arabic language and its grammar, the science of *Hadith*, jurisprudence, mathematics, astronomy, etc.. The mosque was the school, the college, and the university, and some mosques became of international renown. In Morocco, Jami' al-Qarawiyyin [al-Qarawiyyin mosque], founded in Fez by Fatima al-Fihri in 859 A. D., is one example among many others in different parts of the Islamic world.⁵³

In the post colonial era, however, the role of the mosque is reduced to an absolute minimum, especially when the late king, Hassan II, succeeded his father in 1961. Even the Friday sermon in Morocco is dictated by the Ministry of Endowments. No one can volunteer to give a talk or organize any activity without the permission of the official authorities. Though certain acts of worship have no political overtones whatsoever and used to take place in the mosque like *I'tikaf*, they are not allowed any longer. Thus, as a temporary alternative, the members of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* have been compelled to use their homes as venues to hold *I'tikaf* and the like events.

8.5.2.2 *Ribat*

The term “*ribat*” [pl. *ribatat*] is rich in meaning and has a long history. Arabic dictionaries tell us that the word “*ribat*” basically refers to three meanings: it refers to that which is used for binding, tying, fastening, connecting ... such as a cord, string, rope and the like; it means to station and stay in a place to watch against sudden attacks from the enemy; and it also means to persevere in something.⁵⁴

The Quranic and Prophetic usage has broadened the term to accommodate other shades of meaning. In the sayings of the Prophet, it is used to mean, among other things, to endure in acts of worship and perseverance. It also signifies to await prayer after prayer and to stay in an outpost to protect the Muslim territory from enemy incursions.

In Islamic history the “*ribatat*” refer to small military outposts that Muslims established to protect their land. Those who volunteered to carry out such a task were called “*Murabitun*”; they used to busy themselves with worship and learning. According to historians, it is “because of their military and spiritual alertness and their readiness for *jihad* [that] the residents of a “*ribat*” are called “*Murabitun*” in the sense the word is used in the Quran.”⁵⁵ Even when the military significance of those “*ribatat*” was decreased because of other options, “*the ribatat*, however, maintained and in fact enhanced their spiritual character becoming centres of learning and devotion, permeated by the spirit of *jihad*.”⁵⁶ In Morocco many cities and villages still bear the names they were given when they were first established as locations to defend the land against the enemy attack.

Muslim scholars use the word “*ribat*” to denote either of two things: “the first is the location in which the *mujahidun* [sing. *mujahid*] gather to defend the land and repel the enemy attack; and the second to designate the place where righteous believers learn, worship and [perform acts of] remembrance of Allah and study *fiqh* [jurisprudence] in the affairs of this world.”⁵⁷

With these varying, albeit overlapping, semantic, cultural and historical connotations of the word “*ribat*” in mind, *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* has picked the term to designate a type of gathering which may last from twenty-four hours to forty consecutive days. The purpose is to provide an environment for focussed spiritual improvement and knowledge acquisition, and the subjects covered may range from how to recite and pronounce the Quran properly to how to organize a meeting and make well-considered decisions. Various themes could be raised, depending on the needs of the participants.

One may wonder why these people should be cut off from the outside world in order to study such subjects. The idea, as explained above, is to provide a suitable environment where attendees are not distracted and could concentrate on learning as well as on intensive acts of worship. Furthermore, such an environment is believed to cultivate the love for a continuous pursuit of knowledge and spirituality. The objective, according to this line of thinking, is not just to isolate some people for a few days to engage in worship and be taught a few lessons, but more importantly to inculcate in their hearts and minds the love to continue the pursuit on their own.

Referring to a Prophetic tradition, Yassine explains how the perceived positive change in behaviour and attitude could occur in such friendly settings: “The good virtues,” he notes, “may pass from one individual to another, from one group of individuals imbued with a high level of piety and spirituality to others who may be pusillanimous and sick.”⁵⁸ Some social psychologists might describe this process of change in human behaviour in certain settings as the outcome of “interpersonal influence”. In any case, the phenomenon is not odd or unusual. Honore de Balzac, a famous French novelist and playwright, puts it this way: “*De même que le mal, le sublime a sa contagion,*” [like evil, sublimity is also contagious]. Indeed, Yassine uses the word “contagion” to make the point that it is because the positive qualities, like the bad ones, are contagious that one should be careful in choosing friends. It

remains to point out that these “*ribatat*” are held by the movement four times a year: one in autumn, one in winter, one in spring and the fourth in summer.⁵⁹

8.5.2.3 *An-nasiha* meetings

The term *an-nasiha* is one of the central Islamic concepts. Literally, it means “advice”, but in the Quranic and Prophetic usage, it has a wider scope with a strong emphasis on its value and role in the Muslim community. The importance of *an-nasiha*, how it should be delivered, to whom and when and other related issues are dealt with extensively elsewhere and it is not our concern here to go into a detailed discussion of them. To give just a general idea about its place in Islamic thought and culture, it is enough to say that in one of the Prophet’s sayings it is considered the core and the pillar of religion [“*ad-din an-nasiha*”].⁶⁰ The implication is that it encompasses all walks of life, and unless it is offered properly and generously, corruption sets in and the whole society will be in danger. *An-nasiha* is not incumbent upon one person or a group of persons, nor is it conditional upon detaining power, of the pen or the sword; it is rather a common responsibility and everybody should get involved to maintain the well-being of society and protect it from the dire consequences of obnoxious behaviours and wrong policies. It could be delivered in words or deeds or both, and in whatever case, it should not be made through violent means or with the intention to look smarter, or to score a point against someone or to settle an account with an opponent. It is done as a duty to improve a situation but out of love and compassion and not to achieve cheap thrills and petty victories.

It appears that all these shades of meaning were taken into account when the term *an-nasiha* was chosen to designate a type of meeting which, though it seems similar to the previous gatherings, has its special features and objectives. Unlike the previous events, it only lasts about twelve hours, from around 8:00 p.m. and ends the following morning at 7:00 or 8:00 a.m. It basically seeks to provide a focussed opportunity for the members to cultivate faith and *ihsan*. Thus, the moral

and spiritual topics and acts take precedence over political issues. Usually the meeting consists of a brief explanation of a few verses from the Quran, a discussion of a short biography of one of the Companions of the Prophet and reading of a short passage from the book, *Al-Ihsan* followed by a discussion in which all the participants take part. There is usually a special theme threading the different components of the meeting. *An-nasiha* is held every month or two months, depending on the circumstances of the provinces and regions. All the members are entitled, in fact encouraged, to attend, and if the participants are more than the meeting place can afford, they are divided into groups and assigned to different locations.⁶¹

Despite the simplicity, in form as well as in content, of these meetings and their peaceful nature, they are not always interpreted that way by the Moroccan authorities. As pointed out earlier, the police intervened on numerous occasions, arrested the attendants, and took them to the police station to be interrogated. The repercussions of such campaigns made the headlines for quite some time but turned out to be in the advantage of the movement whose reputation was only enhanced by what many people believed to be meaningless if not illegal police measures. Instead of combating crime and drug dealing, many would say, which are gaining ground and making an increasing number of victims, the police wasted time and energy to target peaceful, spiritual gatherings. Lately, it seems that the Moroccan authorities have eased their attitude towards the organization of such events. Whether it is out of political maturity or a kind of stratagem or helplessness reinforced all the more by the recent “Arab spring” remains to be seen. One thing for sure is that these meetings, according to reliable sources, are now being held regularly, albeit in the members’ private homes.

8.5.2.4 *Usra* and branch meetings

The smallest unit in the movement is called “*usra*”, which literally means “family”⁶². Unlike some organizations which use the term “cell” [*khaliya*], *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*

prefers “*usra*” most probably because of the positive feelings it evokes in the collective memory of Muslim societies, namely the feelings of love, compassion, respect, solidarity and the like. It is composed of a small group of people, ranging from six to twelve, headed by a person called *Naquib al-usra* [the *usra* leader]. The formation of the *usra* usually takes into account geographic proximity to facilitate attendance and allow for the development of a strong relationship between the members located in the same vicinity. When the number of the *usra* members exceeds twelve, it is split into two small groups. This development is encouraged and appreciated, for it is regarded as a sign of the presence of a significant degree of dynamism and motivation within the group. Furthermore, besides providing an opportunity for other members to assume leadership positions, it contributes to the continuous growth of the movement as a whole.⁶³

The *usra* used to meet twice a week.⁶⁴ One meeting consists of performing the night prayer together, Quran recital, remembrance of God besides, of course, the obligatory prayers. It usually lasts about twelve hours, like *an-nasiha* gatherings, but, unlike the latter, it only involves a small group. The frequency of these meetings continued thus for over two decades. Then, given the increasing number of activities in which the members are required to participate and, to a certain extent, to make up for a shortage of leaders due to the rapid growth of the movement and of meeting places because most members are still young and do not have their own property, some changes have been introduced in the latest version of the movement’s structure. The *usra* is now to meet every fortnight: one session is focussed on spirituality training and the next is devoted to learning and so on.⁶⁵

The branch, called *shu’ba* in Arabic, is the second unit in the movement’s organizational structure and is composed of a number of “families”, between six and eleven. It used to hold a general assembly every month, but in the new version, every two months. All the members of the “families” belonging to the same branch are required to attend the general assembly which lasts about twelve hours.

It consists of the usual spiritual and moral components besides a discussion of a topic listed in the programme of study to be pursued.⁶⁶

8.6 Conclusion

Education in the movement's strategy for social and political change is of great importance, much in the same way as political action. The reason is that education has as its object of concern what is considered the decisive factor for the success or failure of any reform: the human being. Thus, no reform, in the view of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, can be achieved unless it starts with reforming the human being who is both the end and the means of the aspired change. To focus mainly on political action can hardly make any difference, even if it manages to upset authoritarian rule. According to the leader of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, "to change structures is not enough to install a brotherly social order; we have to change the behaviour of the individual."⁶⁷ Otherwise, it would merely mean replacing one group with another with the same old mentalities, and this would not solve the challenging problems in Morocco or in any other Arab country for that matter. For this reason, *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* thinks that the need for education and training to build the character of the Muslim believer, able to assume their full responsibility, is crucial and constitutes one of the two major fronts in the movement's strategy for comprehensive reform.

However, not any form of education, in the view of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, can serve this daunting task. What seems to readily come to mind when the term education is evoked is imparting or acquiring knowledge and skills. In the view of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, this is just one dimension of education; the other dimension which is missing in many Islamic groups' discourse or praxis or both has to do with the moral and the spiritual. The dire consequences of such neglect are too obvious to be denied: divisions for no good reasons, failure of a number of good initiatives and unbalanced attitudes ranging from violence at one extreme to utter submission to corrupt rulers at the other. This seems to have spurred Sheikh Yassine to propose what he believes to be a model able to overcome the existing gap and its adverse

effects, “a model,” as he describes it, “congenial and propitious for the total efflorescence of man, inspired and enlightened by Revelation received by the Prophet and exemplified in his life and in the community he founded.”⁶⁸

Education, as Yassine and his group understand it, especially in its moral and spiritual dimension, is not achieved by reading books by prominent scholars, or attending lectures given by eminent thinkers or listening to fine talks or moving sermons by eloquent preachers. These may be helpful but are not enough. Their effect is temporary; they may move the audience to tears or ignite their enthusiasm for a while but emotions subside too quickly and rarely, if ever, translate into composed behaviour and well-thought action. The form of education advocated by Yassine and his group is said to focus on character building with the intention to help people to adopt “an attitude, a vision, [and] a will,”⁶⁹ that makes them assume their responsibility towards themselves and their society without being provoked at the slightest incident or distracted by immediate petty ambitions. *Al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, however, has not, in this regard, invented anything; it is just using what already exists in store, that is, the Islamic culture: Quran recital, God’s remembrance, night prayer, *I’tikaf*... and other acts and means recommended by the Prophet himself. The contribution made by Sheikh Yassine is that he has been able to include these components in a coherent framework that combines moral and spiritual pursuit and political action. And this is what appears to be one of the most distinct features of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*.

Chapter 9 General Conclusions

This research, by focussing on the emergence of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* in the early 1980s, its development, its attitude towards issues of special interest and its strategy to take root in society and press for social and political reform in Morocco, sought to achieve a better understanding of a Moroccan Islamic experience and of the reasons behind its rise and rapid growth to become, despite the obstacles it has faced over the last three decades, “an established force in the country’s social and political firmament.”¹ This chapter summarizes the main arguments discussed in the forgoing chapters at the methodological as well as the substantive levels and ends with a brief presentation of the expected scenarios and some ideas for future research.

9.1 Interpretations and misinterpretations

In the introductory chapter to this thesis, we examined a number of theories to see how close they have come to comprehend the Islamic revival. We saw there that despite their important contributions to a debate which has been going on for nearly four decades or so, they have been unable to generate an adequate understanding of the Islamic phenomenon. This is not because the latter is hard or impossible to explain, but rather because the approaches often used are not apt for studying such a phenomenon. A basic error incurred by these approaches, as one critic has pointed out is that “they tend to occlude by assumption and argument ideas central to the appeal of fundamentalists’ ways of seeing the world.”² It is no wonder, then, that different, and even contradictory, theories³ should continue to proliferate, obfuscating even more the issue rather than clarifying it and, in certain cases, spurring alarmist, if not extreme, views and recommendations. In some accounts Islamists are described as “religious Stalinists”⁴ representing the surge or the “scourge” of the “Green Peril”, an image reminiscent of the Cold War discourse

on what was referred to as the “Red Menace” and the “Yellow Peril”⁵. Various terms to the same effect have been used to designate the Islamic resurgence in order to come to the conclusion that it is “a phenomenon to be contained or overcome.”⁶

To be sure not all critics have pursued this line of analysis. Roxanne Euben, for instance, from whom this research has benefited, particularly at the methodological level, demonstrates in her book, *Enemy in the Mirror*, why rationalist approaches have failed to generate a better understanding of the Islamic phenomenon which, in her view, “is becoming more rather than less powerful.”⁷ She contends that “stories [that] function to discredit adherents [i.e. Islamists] as fanatical lunatics or agent of regressive chaos, or to reduce fundamentalist ideas to mere conduits, they all miss the opportunity to understand the appeals of fundamentalism.”⁸ To allow for such an opportunity, or, as she puts it, “to provide a window into a world often distorted by our [i.e. Westerners’]own cultural experiences and anxieties,”⁹ and achieve a better understanding of the Islamic revival, Euben advocated a dialogic model of interpretation whereby Islamists are presented on their own terms rather through categories alien to their worldview and inattentive to cultural differences.¹⁰

I need not repeat here the arguments exposed in the first chapter to demonstrate the validity of this approach to studying *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, or any other Islamic movement for that matter. Rather, I would focus here on how this approach has enabled us to produce an account that I argue reflects as far as possible what is perceived to be the true nature of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* and the real motives behind its emergence and rapid growth. Using a variety of reliable sources and taking into account the worldview to which the movement adheres, I argued that its appearance cannot be explained by any of the theories anchored in the secularist framework of analysis.

By contrast, if seen from an Islamic perspective and through Islamic categories and terms, it should be easier to come to the conclusion that *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* is in consonance with the social and cultural environment in which it emerged, an environment whose Islamic identity has been established since Islam found its way to North Africa in the seventh century.¹¹ It cannot, therefore, be viewed as an “intruder” or an anachronistic phenomenon with which the Moroccan society is at odds. It also squares with the basic characteristics of a modern Islamic movement, as defined in chapter one, such as modern organization, political engagement and the quest for social and political reform from a reasoned perspective based on Islamic sources. It cannot, therefore, be considered, as some accounts claim, “a confrerie” or a Sufi order¹² for the simple reason that the latter does not display the features just mentioned, particularly political engagement. Sufis, as we saw in Chapter 4, only focus on spiritual matters. Also the way *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* is organized and managed, with its various governing bodies and committees and a variety of activities and techniques for recruitment and mobilization as well as other aspects discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 and 8, all make the differences between *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* as a modern Islamic movement in its own right and a traditional Sufi order crystal clear.

If *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* can neither be conflated with a Sufi order nor seen as an odd phenomenon, the interpretations which regard it as a mere response to the failures of the regime in place to cope with the country’s social and economic crises and nothing else do not hold either. This does not mean that *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* is not concerned with these socio-economic problems. The movement of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, or any other Islamic group in the sense used in this research -which by the way represents the mainstream viewpoint- does not operate in a vacuum or is set for no purpose or for purposes that have nothing to do with this worldly life. Far from it; but to claim that it is a mechanical reaction to the inability of the ruling elite to solve or alleviate the prevailing crises excludes from the analysis a central dimension of the worldview to which Muslims in general subscribe, that is, the

belief in God and the moral obligation “to enjoin good and forbid evil”, a principle which Islamic sources have dealt with extensively.¹³

It follows that when the leader of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, for example, addressed an open letter to the late king, Hassan II, it was not motivated just by the desire to draw the latter’s attention to the increasing problems plaguing the country, but also by the feeling to implement an Islamic duty. Thus to explain such an initiative by the kind of interpretations we saw in Chapter 2 which downplayed this moral consideration cannot be convincing from an Islamic perspective. Even from a realistic point of view, some explanations appear to be problematic. To claim, for instance that Yassine’s letter was spurred by his ambition to construct “his image as a charismatic leader”¹⁴ appears to be far from the reality. It is no safe game to address a monarch like Hassan II the way Yassine did; otherwise, many would have done the same.

Drawing on the dialogic model of interpretation has, furthermore, enabled us to demonstrate that although *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* is engaged with issues and concepts, like the ones we studied in Chapter 4, it is not disconnected from the modern world and its concerns. Indeed, as Chapter 5 demonstrates, it has not hesitated to express its views on a number of modern issues. Again because it is read through the lens of approaches embedded in, and constrained by the assumptions of the rationalist tradition and discourse, its attitude towards some of these issues such as modernity, democracy and women’s rights is not well understood. It is not clear why Yassine and his group are depicted in some accounts as being against democracy, modernity and women. “To be against” evokes the opposite image, that is, dictatorship, archaism, misogyny and persistent nostalgia to the age of “the camel and the tent”. This image, as I have argued, is more a kind of caricatured representation of what would some authors call “the Other” rather than an adequate attempt to analyze and understand their viewpoints.

It is true that there are some strands within Islamic phenomenon which may have extreme views on such issues, but they do not represent mainstream Islam, nor can they aspire to anytime in the future, in Morocco or elsewhere. Since they do not represent the overwhelming Islamic trend, there is no reason why they should be inflated in some analyses to the point of obfuscating the whole Islamic landscape. Extremism has always existed and will most probably continue to exist in all cultures and religions, however peace-loving these may be, but it seems that human societies have always known how to guard against and overcome bigotry whatever its shape and hue, religious or otherwise.

Perhaps some critics understood from Skeikh Yassine's critique of modernity which is admittedly harsh sometimes that he rejected it wholesale, which, as I demonstrated in Chapter 5, is not the case. If he criticized what is called the "dark side" of modernity, he also praised its achievements and insisted that Muslims should learn and welcome its technological and scientific fruits. Thus, the fact that he was critical of its negative aspects does not entail that he was oblivious of its "bright side", nor does it mean that there are only two options: either to accept it unconditionally or reject it wholesale. Between the two extremes there is a large space where sensible people could debate what is good for humanity.

Furthermore, Yassine was not alone to level scathing criticism to modernity. Many Western scholars, as Euben has pointed out, have also made the same "from relatively diverse political and moral perspectives."¹⁵ Such being the case, it is tempting to agree with the very point she makes regarding Qutb's critique of modernity as coming from someone who despite "his profound engagement with specifically Islamic debates about reason, interpretation and revealed law, [...] is also participating in a conversation that we, as Western students of politics not only recognize, but in which we participate."¹⁶ The same could be said about democracy and the status of Muslim women. If Yassine criticized aspects of the trajectory that some secularists would like the Muslim woman to take, it does not mean that he and his group advocate the subjugation of women or condone the abject situation

in which ignorance and traditions alien to the letter and spirit of Islam have placed them;¹⁷ nor does it entail that they stand for political tyranny by their criticism of some aspects of democracy. On the contrary, though he underlined the weaknesses and the limits of democracy, he also stressed its strengths and even recognized its potential to allow for a smooth transition from the prevailing dark absolutism.¹⁸

If the movement of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* cannot be explained, as we have argued, as “a mechanical response to structural pressures,” or a consequence of the unavailability of other channels to express social and political grievances, or as an irrational phenomenon hailing from, and triggered by, a society in crisis, then how can we define it? My simple answer to this question is that it is just a natural response from an Islamic point of view to legitimate demands, of material and moral order, motivated, before anything else, by religious drives. This does not mean, as I explained above, that the desire to improve social and political conditions is excluded or deemed of little value, but rather to stress, as I have argued in this thesis, that seeking improvement of socio-political conditions is not in and by itself sufficient enough to convincingly explain its rise and its rapid growth, in a relatively short time, to become, as Lise Storm has pointed out, “the largest Islamic movement in the country.”¹⁹

By saying that *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* is “a response”, I mean that it is not and should not, at any moment, be regarded as the only or the sole legitimate response. It is one group among others which do exist and equally qualify as Islamic initiatives. Hence the idea of pluralism in Islamic activism should not be frowned upon. In fact, it is permitted, as we saw in the first chapter, by Islamic texts themselves. There seems to be no reason, therefore, why some observers should be surprised that Islamists, despite having the same frame of reference, should differ. One critic goes even to state that there is not one Islam but several.²⁰ My argument here, as discussed in Chapter 1, is that such a claim does not hold. Instead, we can speak about different interpretations, resulting from differences in intellectual, moral and spiritual

capacities and in circumstances and the impact of all of these factors on the use of the tool of *Ijtihad*; yet, they all share the basic Islamic fundamentals [*Usul*].

The error in the analyses which speak about “many *Islams*” is that they fail to distinguish between two spheres in Islam: one is open to interpretation and which, as I demonstrated in Chapter 1, is vast indeed; and the other which is limited and encompasses only those Islamic principles which are conclusive in both meaning and transmission. This does not make Islam an amorphous belief system liable to be interpreted the way one pleases, nor does it entail that all Muslims should be thrust into a single mould. We saw there that there are rules which maintain the core and the bases of Islam intact but in the mean time open the door wide open for the Muslim mind to be constantly active and creative in its quest to cope with or adapt to changing circumstances. To what extent Muslims have lived up to this reality is another story which, for reasons of space, we only touched upon in our discussion of the concept of *ijtihad* in Chapter 4.

Having identified the sources of misinterpretations and wrong perceptions which, I argue, are due to the use of approaches informed by a secularist vision which no longer sees any place for religion in political life and tried to demonstrate how to achieve a better understanding of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, or any other Islamic group for that matter, let us now turn to the major question which we investigated in this research, that is, why should one response, based on Islamic sources and *ijtihad*, to what is perceived legitimate demands, rise to prominence more than others? More precisely, how can we explain the appeal and the rapid growth of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* in an environment already populated by different Islamic groups? The answer as it unfolded in the foregoing chapters relates to the following issues: charisma and structures, coherent theoretical framework, an alternative strategy and special emphasis on *tarbiya* [education]. Let us summarize what our discussion has led us to with respect to each issue.

9.2 Charisma and structures

This study demonstrates that one of the distinctive features which played a crucial role in whatever achievements the movement was able to accomplish has to do with leadership and organization. Headed by a man of such talents, genuine piety and a wide knowledge of both Islamic and Western culture, *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* was able to draw the attention of the Moroccan public since its early days. The qualifications and qualities of the movement's founding leader made him in the eyes of many Moroccan people a figure that commanded respect and even admiration. Even those who disagreed totally or partially with his line of thinking recognized his talents, sincerity and his courage to say "no and in powerful ways,"²¹ to despotic rule, as evidenced by his two audacious open letters to Hassan II and King Mohamed VI, respectively.²² His funeral, considered the largest –or the second largest– in the modern history of Morocco, for it was attended not only by the movement's members and sympathizers but also by people of all stripes and of various persuasions, including the left, may be an indication that Morocco has indeed lost an opposition figure of high calibre, whatever one may think of his views and stances.

What is worthy of note is that Yassine seemed to have those specific attributes which make a public figure in an Islamic society qualify as charismatic. To illustrate this point, let us look at the following passage:

The influence of any public figure or trend was [...] measured by the degree to which he partook in Prophetic charisma through achieving the right combination of qualities and qualifications. The key element, of course, was the spiritual worth of the man: his integrity and personal embodiment of the divine message. Thus the qualifications of the founders of the six major schools of legal thought in Islam were not merely their intellectual capacities and through knowledge of the law, but also their personal integrity and personal piety. They were renowned for their intense religiosity, and had often to prove their incorruptibility under ordeal. All reformers had to show this essential combination of qualities to get a hearing.²³

If we go back to Chapter 2, where a brief life story of Yassine is provided, we will immediately recognize the relevance of the text just cited to Yassine's personality and experience. Besides his intellectual capacities and wide knowledge, his

“intense religiosity”, as evidenced by his Sufi experience, and the ability to stand up alone to an autocratic monarch and the cost he had to pay to take such a stance – more than five years of imprisonment and a decade under house arrest– all seem to support the idea that he had achieved “this essential combination of qualities to get a hearing.” Many people believed his integrity and felt that he had given proof to be trusted for “*irshad*” [guidance in the Islamic sense of the word] and for leadership in the struggle for social and political reform.²⁴ Thus it is no exaggeration to conclude that he represented a major factor in the movement’s fast expansion.

Does this mean that *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* was totally dependent on its leader? In the view of some the answer is a resounding “yes”. They claim that he used to make all the decisions and that the members were only executing the orders they received from their “boss” who ran the movement “as his personal fiefdom.”²⁵ However, as we saw in Chapter 3, senior members of the movement dismiss these claims as unfounded. They assert that although Sheikh Yassine was the central ideologue and spiritual guide, he never played “the flawless leader”, nor did he appreciate the idea of staying “on top of everything” or having “the last word in everything”. On the contrary, his style of leadership let the movement assume its full responsibilities since the early days of its foundation, for he was of the view that a leader, at any level of the organization, should encourage others to think and take the initiative and not think or act in their place. He also stressed, they argue, in his speeches and writings that the daunting challenges facing the current endeavours to reform Muslim societies are such that they require the cooperation and contribution of all and not just one or a few people whatever their qualifications and skills.²⁶

According to reliable sources Yassine started, in around the third year after launching his association in 1981, to withdraw gradually until he stopped attending the regular meetings of the Guidance Council, the highest governing body of the movement. The move was apparently taken to set an example to the movement’s

leadership. Although the latter continued to see him from time to time to keep him informed or to discuss with him some issues of special importance, they assert that he would never impose anything on them or nominate, as some critics claimed, any official of a branch, region, province or whatever. If he had a suggestion, he would submit it to debate and he would never go against the majority. Consultation in his view is not a speech to be learnt by heart, but a principle that should be cultivated and observed at every level of the organization.²⁷

This positive image is highly contested by some critics and particularly Yassine's detractors who contend that he "was the movement"²⁸ and that whatever achievements there were depended on his being at the helm. Some of them went even to predict that the movement would soon fade away after his disappearance. My contention is that it is highly improbable that thousands of members, many of whom are highly educated (university teachers, engineers, doctors, etc.) should be willing to be led by the nose like a flock of sheep²⁹. They are not compelled to join the movement in the first place, and nothing can force them to stay if they are not happy with the movement's leadership, particularly because there are other options, that is, other Islamic groups like Unity and Reform and PJD and others. Thus if they felt they are stifled or marginalized or have made the wrong choice, nothing could deter them from quitting immediately.

Whatever the case may be -whether we accept the movement's narrative or that of its opponents- there is general agreement that Yassine's charisma was central in the quick expansion of the movement, for it not only inspired the members to work hard and be at their best but it also encouraged others to join. Such being the case, one cannot deny that there are risks. Unless there are structures and a clear vision, parties and social and political movements which grow around a central figure, as some analysts have rightly noted, tend to go into a period of disarray, if not to disintegrate, after the disappearance of their founding leaders. An oft-cited example is the case of Muslim brotherhood after the assassination of its charismatic leader Hassan Banna in 1949; it remained without leadership for nearly

three years.³⁰ My understanding from the interviews I had with Sheikh Yasine is that he was not unaware of such risks and that apparently in order to forestall something of the sort, he encouraged early on structures and practices and insisted on internal consultation [*shura*] with a view to build a coherent, enduring force able to carry on with its mission and not disperse when a person or a group of persons passed away.

In addition to the factor of charismatic leadership, the way in which the movement has coped with the regime's repressive policies and handled the issue of organization has also helped to sustain its growth. As is well-known, one of the daunting challenges that every social and political movement has to deal with is not just to convince some people to join in, nor even to secure their loyalty; the real challenge is to generate sustained enthusiasm, active involvement and commitment to the required tasks, whatever the obstacles. It is not enough to have a thousand members, for example, but the question is how they can be motivated to contribute actively to the promotion of the organization's objectives without being offered any material incentives. To meet this challenge, *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, as we saw in Chapters 3 and 8, has used a variety of resources and developed or adapted new techniques to enhance its mobilization capabilities. It has incessantly sought to modify, update or rethink its structures and diversify its activities so that every individual can find a place and get involved. This may explain why some researchers consider that the strength of the movement lies rather in its organization.³¹ This is not to say, however, that its strategy has always worked well, but the importance of what has been achieved cannot be denied. The irony, however, is that the Moroccan regime, without intending it of course, has assisted to boost the movement's efficacy in this respect! Its repeated crackdowns have provided the motivation for people to sympathize with the movement on the one hand and on the other have helped, as group dynamics theory argues,³² to maintain the psychological conditions that make members get more implicated and seek more support.

9.3 A coherent theoretical framework

Another factor which, as some authors have remarked,³³ played a crucial role in the rise and rapid growth of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* is related to the theoretical framework on which it is based. In the 1970s and 1980s a major problem which faced many Islamist groups in Morocco is that they lacked clear answers to many pertinent questions. Sometimes involvement in politics was regarded as too premature because of the perceived low level of political awareness among the people, and sometimes it was even seen as a distraction from what the true objectives of an Islamic movement should be, whereas in the view of others the reverse was more appropriate on the grounds that Islamic values were nowhere to be revived unless Muslims got deeply involved in political activism. At one moment the use of force was considered an option to implement the required reform; at another it was rejected and more emphasis was put on peaceful means. Some groups could not decide whether they should focus on quality and promote an elitist group or whether they should target the masses and be more flexible and inclusive, whether they should work in the open or go underground, whether all sectors should be targeted or some sectors like the police and the army should be avoided... These are just samples of the plethora of questions that required clear answers at the time.³⁴ Though some of them may appear commonplace or even banal today, the situation was different in those days. No wonder that disagreement over a number of issues occurred, causing splits in some groups and many problems for others.

Al-Adl wal-Ihsan, however, did not face similar impediments because a comprehensive view which, though it cannot be claimed to be ideal or above criticism, was already in place. Sheikh Yassine had spent years to work it out before he started to write about it in his journal *Al-Jamaa* in 1980, that is, a few months earlier before the foundation of his association. Thus, contrary to other

groups which were hesitant and even crippled for some time because they could not decide which way to go,³⁵ *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, then called *Usrat al-Jamaa*, was operational the moment it was set up. The slogan it raised from the very beginning, often referred to as “*The 3 NOs*”: no to violence, no to underground activism, no to any ties, financial or organizational, with any foreign party, seemed to have an important effect on its expansion.³⁶ Instead of being on the defensive or under the constant fear of being “uncovered”, as if they had been engaged in illegal activities, the members, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, were emboldened by the feeling that their objectives were legitimate and consequently why they should be denied the right to pursue them. The ensuing logic was: why should we hide if what we are after is legitimate? Why should we seek to impose anything on people if what we are proposing is good for them? This position, hardly appreciated among some Islamists at the time, not only secured, as I argued, a good psychological start for the movement and facilitated its growth, but also obstructed infiltration and manipulation and helped the movement to maintain its coherence and independence.

In addition to some pertinent organizational choices, other factors also come into play to explain the movement’s appeal, namely the claimed middle course it has taken regarding a number of issues, modern and Islamic. As Chapters 4 and 5 demonstrate, the movement advocates an approach that seeks to stay away from the two extremes: rejectionism and uncritical acceptance. Thus, it accepts democratic mechanisms without reservations, but it refuses that Islam should be chased from political life, it hails modernity achievements but not its “dark side”, and it argues for positive interaction with the modern world and for the necessity of learning from its experiences, but it stresses on the right of Muslim societies to pursue the trajectory that suits them to achieve progress and development. The same logic is also maintained to tackle the issue of women’s rights which are believed to be guaranteed by Islam but tampered with under authoritarian rule. Accordingly, the focus becomes, or should become, how to breathe life in these rights and strive to make them a reality. According to *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, this

necessitates, among other things, that women should get engaged in organized action and not wait for others to conduct the struggle for them. Indeed, by incorporating women in the movement since the early years of its foundation, it is not surprising that they should make at least half its present membership.³⁷

Concerning some hot Islamic issues such as Sufism, *ijtihad* and perception of society, which we discussed in Chapter 4, Sheikh Yassine appears to have registered some points which seem to have a boosting effect on the expansion of his movement. His ability to argue for certain options in some cases and to offer alternatives in others seems to have won the interest and the support of many people. For instance, before the foundation of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, many young people yearning for spiritual fulfilment had only two options neither of which deemed satisfactory: traditional Sufism and what it all entails (withdrawal from society, obedience to, if not support of, the corrupt regime, controversial religious practices, etc.); or a rebellious but hollow Islamic activism. Sheikh Yassine tried to offer a model that averts the weaknesses of both options and made of the spiritual and ethical component the beading cord that threads all the aspects of his brand of Islamism.

Some critics are confused at what they consider “a strange mix”, which makes Yassine and his movement hard to classify,³⁸ but if seen from an Islamic perspective, it is just a form of *ijtihad* that tries to give due consideration to each dimension of Islam, without stressing one at the expense of the others. To what extent he succeeded to achieve such a goal is not our concern here, but what should be noted is that his model seems to have found a good hearing and all the more so because it was buttressed by the living example he represented (his piety, his continuous opposition to the monarchy and the price he had to pay for his refusal to be coopted) and the individual experiences of those who got involved. No sooner had they “discovered” the spiritual warmth of the meetings they attended than they, in turn, started to encourage others, starting with parents, relatives, friends and neighbours, to come along and live the experience and then judge for

themselves.³⁹ No one, to the best knowledge of this author, has ever pointed to the importance of this factor in the quick expansion of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*.

Another factor which also should be taken into account concerns the movement's perception of the current Muslim societies. Whereas some groups, influenced by what they understood, rightly or wrongly, from the term *jahiliya* used by Mawlana Mawdudi and Sayid Qutb to describe Muslim societies, Sheikh Yassine employed an alternative concept, *fitna* [trial, tribulation] to argue for a completely different perception. In his view, as explained in Chapter 4, Muslim societies, however loose their attachment to Islam, cannot be described as unbelievers, nor can be divided into two distinct blocks: the good guys and the bad ones. Muslim societies are undoubtedly in need of reform and reformers but certainly not "judges" engaged in the sole business of passing judgement on others.⁴⁰ Muslim societies, according to Yassine, are in need of "compassion" and "*rifq*" [gentleness] and of time and patience in order to cope with the heavy legacy of centuries of despotic rule.⁴¹ This perception which promotes reconciliation with society and understanding, but not condoning, has had positive results on the reputation of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*. Many parents, noting that joining *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* had a positive impact on the behaviour of their "committed youth", appreciated the work undertaken and, if they themselves did not become active members, they would offer support for the movement in one form or another.⁴²

9.4 An alternative reform strategy

How to resolve the problem of authoritarianism was a question that imposed itself shortly after Morocco's independence in 1956, particularly when it became clear that the monarchy was determined to wield untrammelled powers to govern the country as it saw fit. Since then many attempts have been made, ranging from trying to get rid of the monarchy altogether to seeking change from within. Unfortunately, none of those attempts has succeeded, and, as demonstrated in Chapter 6, the sad point is that the *Makhzenian* strategies seem to have been very

effective in not only neutralizing “revolutionaries” as well as “reformists”, but also in divesting them of whatever good reputation they had built up over many years of political activism. Thus, these forces appear to have lost in both ways: they neither managed to curb the monarchy’s sweeping powers, nor did they preserve their credibility.

In an attempt to avoid the errors and pitfalls of the other two major options which have been tried so far, *Al-Adl wal-Ihsan* has opted for an alternative strategy which seeks gradual comprehensive change through peaceful means. Though this may seem hard to conceive, *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* has presented what it claims to be a coherent view based on Islamic sources, human experience and a careful analysis of the Moroccan history and situation. As discussed in Chapter 7, it has even proposed what could be described as a road map to press for change in a more peaceful manner and avoid the violent scenarios which have taken place in many a country. The gist of its proposal is that it would start with consensus building around a national pact and end with a new constitution and general elections, without excluding other ideas that may emanate from free public debate. Ample clarifications have been provided to stress the viability of the proposed course of action. Though some people contend that the movement’s strategy seems to be leading nowhere, claiming that there is no indication that the monarchy will, any time soon, consider making any serious move to allow for the emergence of a democratic system, others, however, are of the view that the movement has chosen the right path. It is not our concern to say who is right and who is wrong, but one thing for sure is that the movement’s choice has picked up significant support. Thus, it is not surprising that it should constitute an important source for the strong appeal the movement has enjoyed over the last three decades.

What appears to make the movement’s strategy look even more appealing is that it combines, in a unique way, political action and moral and spiritual promotion. Thus, as it has devised a plan for political action, it has also provided, as we saw in Chapter 8, a character building programme, with special emphasis on the ethical

and spiritual dimension. This stems from its belief in the priority of *tarbiya* [education] to reform the individual whom it considers the decisive factor in the success of any project. Though not all Islamists subscribe to the way in which *tarbiya* is understood and practiced by the movement, they do not deny its importance. Their problem, in my view, is that they have not translated what they understand by *tarbiya* into a programme able to yield palpable results.

By contrast, *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* seems to have achieved a remarkable success in this respect. Instead of engaging in what it considers polemical discussions of little or no value, it lays much emphasis on the know-how. A detailed programme, as explained in Chapter 8, has been put in place and various measures are taken to create a suitable environment for the proposed programme to be fulfilled and bear fruit. Indeed, the spiritual activities and the numerous *majalis* [meetings] which the members are strongly encouraged to attend have had an undeniable impact on the sustained coherence of the movement, on its disciplined organization and, above all, on its rapid growth. It is worth noting that what some outsiders may see as “a heavy moral and spiritual dose” does not seem to compromise or marginalize political action. A certain balance has so far been maintained in what appears to be a unique Moroccan Islamic experience.

9.5 Recap and perspectives for the future

It follows that the rapid growth of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* and the strong appeal it has maintained over the last thirty years or so in the Moroccan society cannot be attributed to any one factor. As this study has tried to demonstrate, several factors come into play in the making of this Moroccan experience. It is true that they cannot be placed on the same level of importance, but it is hard to isolate them and tell in percentage terms which has a boosting effect on the expansion of the movement more than which. It would, thus, be safer to conclude that all the factors raised in this study have combined to produce a brand of Islamism that many Moroccan people have found very appealing. The question is: how long will those

factors be sustained to secure the continuous popularity of the movement? Will it be affected now that its “architect” and central ideologue is no more?

Actually this question was raised several times well before the death of Sheikh Yassine. Whenever rumours circulated about his imminent death because of some real or imagined illness, questions about the future of the movement made the headlines: What would happen to *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* after the disappearance of its founding leader? Who would succeed him? How long would it stay united? And so on. Then analysts and journalists would start to analyze and categorize. Some spoke of the hawks and the doves within the movement, the old and the new generations, and the old guard who would stay the course and the young who would prefer to get involved in the game and have a slice of the cake, whereas others offered more pessimistic scenarios, predicting the imminent disintegration of the movement into rival splinter groups, as happened to some organizations in the aftermath of an influential leader’s demise or absence.

When Yassine’s death was announced on 13th December 2012 -and it was not a rumour this time- the burning question about the fate of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* resurfaced. Putting aside the less serious writings or those spurred by some sense of schadenfreude, some respected academics did speak about the real challenge the movement would be facing after the death of Yassine. Michael Willis, fellow in Moroccan and Mediterranean studies at Oxford University, pointed out that “the movement grew around him [Yassine], all members read his writings, he was at the centre of things.”⁴³ This is apparently to underline the gravity of the loss that *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* suffered, but he added that “the movement had been preparing for his death for the last decade or so –there are structures in place.”⁴⁴ Other observers wonder whether “the movement will reconsider a cornerstone of Yassine’s thinking –the rejection of the monarchy’s religious and political legitimacy,”⁴⁵ whereas some analysts could not tell for sure whether the movement would maintain “its political might.”⁴⁶

To be sure there are real challenges ahead; however; predictions about the movement's imminent demise appear unrealistic. The smooth election of Sheikh Mohamed El Abbadi as successor to Yassine shortly after the latter's death may be an indication that should allay some scepticism. It was indeed the first test regarding an issue which had provided, for nearly two decades, much fodder to many articles and interviews, not to mention gossip papers. The fact that it was overcome without any problems seems to endorse the movement's claim that it had installed structures and organizational practices that foster a vision and a line of thinking rather than personality cults. It also indicates that *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* is here to stay and will most probably continue to be a force to be reckoned with⁴⁷. It seems that there is nothing that would make sober-minded observers dismiss such a prospect as unfounded. If the Muslim Brotherhood, to cite but one example, despite all the ordeals it has gone through over nearly nine decades and the problems it is still facing, has nonetheless survived and continues to pose a real challenge to incumbent rulers in Egypt and in the Middle East, there is no reason why a well-established, large movement like *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, which has coped successfully with all the repressive measures to which it has been subjected since its inception, should not survive and, why not, even thrive.

This does not mean that other "less bright scenarios" are totally excluded; big surprises in the trajectory of social, political and religious movements are possible in both the positive as well as in the negative sense. That said, the real challenge, in my view, for *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* is not to survive but to thrive, that is, to sustain its popularity and continue to increase its support base and be trusted in its approach to social and political reform. This would be possible only if the assets (leadership and organization, ideological coherence, emphasis on *tarbiya*...) which mediated its rise and rapid growth are maintained if not further improved. Should any of them be perturbed in any way and to any degree, the movement would be affected accordingly. Will the movement continue to emphasize on *tarbiya* as it used to do during the life of Sheikh Yassine? Will it continue to be well organized and maintain its ideological coherence? Even the choice of a successor may not be all that

matters. The real question is to see to what extent, for example, the new leadership will be able to carry out the same function as the old one. In any case, some time is certainly needed before we can know for sure or any assessment can be ventured.

9.6 Suggestions for future research

This study does not claim that the explanation it has offered cannot be challenged or above criticism, nor has it sought to explore, for practical reasons, everything that should be known about *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*. Thus there are still other issues that are worthy of further research such as the concept of *bay'ah* [oath of allegiance], an issue about which there is much discussion in Islamic thought and which, to this day, has been used and misused in political struggles and disputes over legitimacy. How does *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* view this issue and how does it envisage its practical translation in the modern era? The concept of *jihad*, another controversial term, is also worthy of investigation to see how it is understood by a large movement like *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*. Although there is a short piece of research on this subject carried out a few years ago, its author admitted that he had mainly relied on two of Yassine's books and thus may have missed aspects crucial to an adequate understanding of the subject.⁴⁸ There is also the issue of international relations in the thought of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* in which many policy makers, especially in this region of the world –North Africa–, may be very interested. The possibility of having to interact one day with an Islamist interlocutor at the helm of power or as a major participant in the making of decisions that may have their repercussions in the Mediterranean region should not be totally ruled out. Therefore, it is important to know the views of this potential new comer in this respect. It may also be of interest to undertake research comparing how *tarbiya* [education] is understood and practised by *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* and *at-Tawhid wal-Islah* [Unity and Reform], another important Islamic group in Morocco. There are other subjects which could also be considered for further research.

However, one particular subject which has to do with the relation between *da'wa* [the call to Islam] and the state is, to my mind, of special interest. Its importance lies in the absence of a modern Islamic model with which Islamists could identify. The only ideal experience to which they all refer dates back to the first century of the Islamic calendar, that is, 14 centuries ago. Owing to the drastic changes in the circumstances of Muslim societies, most Islamists are of the view that it cannot be copied literally, nor is it necessary to do so. Islam does not specify any one particular form of government but it does insist on certain principles and values. As long as those principles and values are observed, it does not matter much which form of government is adopted.

That said, the big challenge for modern Islamic movements is to work out “a formula through which modern life could be subsumed under Islam, and thus heal the schism in the psyche of the Islamic community.”⁴⁹ Although some attempts have been made, the outcome, notwithstanding the prevailing hard circumstances, is far from satisfactory. Sheikh Yassine has devoted a significant space in his writings to this issue and it may be interesting to know what he proposes to cope with what appears to be a thorny subject in Islamic thought. The question is not only to put forward an arrangement that fits the current modern circumstances, but especially to prevent the state from being captured and monopolized by any reform movements, *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* or any other Islamic or non-Islamic group for that matter. Something of the sort did occur in the past several times, in Morocco and elsewhere, and whenever that transformation happened to the extent that “the reform movement became the state and the latter became the former”, it did not take long before principles were compromised and degeneration and decline set in⁵⁰. So, how to secure the continuous presence and independence of *da'wa*, represented by mainstream Islam, and in the meantime preclude the hegemony and tyranny of the state? To what extent can Yassine’s ideas on this topic provide a basis for an arrangement applicable to modern life and able to win the trust and confidence of the majority of the people? A cursory reading of Yassine’s writings

may suggest scores of questions that need to be explored, which means that there is still ample opportunity for further research.

What is worthy of note, however, is that whatever topic is picked up for research, certain requirements are highly recommended. First of all the importance of Arabic language cannot be over-stressed. Most of Yassine's writings and the documents issued by his movement are in Arabic and unless one has an adequate knowledge of Arabic language, one is bound to rely on others for his or her understanding. As we have seen in this thesis, mediators are not always, if ever, neutral or competent to render what they have read accurately. In Chapter 2 we saw examples of flagrant mistranslations which nonetheless were used to make a point or to draw some wrong conclusions. Therefore, in order not to read through the lens of others and to deal directly with the sources, the question of Arabic language cannot be avoided.

The second important requirement is to have access to reliable sources and to be aware of some considerations in order to benefit from them. I need not repeat here my discussion in Chapter 1 about the errors incurred by some researchers who, for example, failed to distinguish between the constant and the changeable in the thought of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* or who failed to take into account the date of composition and of publication of certain books or documents. This is important in order not to base one's analysis on the wrong data. Many false perceptions emerged not because some researchers were not smart enough but rather because they did not know how or where to go to get the right information.

A third requirement is to have some knowledge of the frame of reference to which all Islamists claim to subscribe, particularly the major Islamic sources, the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet, and also the history of Islamic thought. What is considered a "new phenomenon" may not be so, for it may be a recurrent effort in consonance with earlier Islamic events of a similar nature. In this study I argued that the rise of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* is not alien to the environment in which it emerged;

on the contrary, it is a familiar phenomenon, just like any other Islamic groups, in an Islamic context. The difference between such groups, however, lies in the vision and the method that each group has elaborated under the Islamic paradigm and the extent to which they respond to the people's needs.

A last but not least requirement has to do with the approach of analysis. Unless Islamists are presented on their own terms and unless prejudices and biased stances are overcome, and so are approaches anchored in a vision which sees no place for religion in politics, theories and explanations may continue to proliferate, but they will not be of any help to understand *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* or any other Islamic group for that matter.

Chapter 1.

¹ Literally *Usrat* means “family” and *al-Jama`a*, “group”, which was the name of a publication Yassine started in 1977. The idea is that they were a “small group”, “a family”, around a modest journal called *aljama`a*.

² John P. Entelis, “Un Courant Populaire Mis à l’Ecart,” *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 589, (2002), pp.20-21; Michael J. Willis, “Justice and Development or Justice and Spirituality? The Challenge of Morocco’s Nonviolent Islamist Movements,” in *The Maghrib in the New Century: Identity, Religion, and Politics*, ed. by Bruce Maddy-Weitzman and Daniel Zisenwine (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2007), p.156; and Francesco Cavatorta, “Civil society, Islamism and Democratization: The Case of Morocco,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol.44, no.2, (June 2006), p 213.

³ For more details about Islamic groups in Morocco see Muhammad Darif, *Al-Islam as-Siyasi fi al-Maghrib: Mukaraba Watha’iqiya* [Political Islam in Morocco: A Documentary Approach] (Casablanca: Mansurat al-Majalla al-Maghribiya li-’Ilm al-Ijtima` as-Siyasi, 1992) and also his book, *Al-Islamiyun al-Maghariba:1969-1999* [The Moroccan Islamists: 1968-1999] (Casablanca: Mansurat al-Majalla al-Maghribiya li-’Ilm al-Ijtima` as-Siyasi, 1999).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ This point will be examined in more detail in Chapter 3.

⁶ This letter was sent to Hassan II in 1974. For more detail, see Chapter 2.

⁷ Michael J. Willis, pp.164-165.

⁸ The Spanish paper *El Pais*, 24th December 2012, described Yassine’s funeral as second only to that of the late king Hassan II. The difference, however, is that the burial of the latter was delayed two days to allow time for the necessary preparations, including compelling, in one way or another, some people and encouraging others to attend, placing at their disposal all the means of transport for free. The *El Pais* article could be accessed at:

http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2012/12/24/actualidad/1356369726_724283.html.

⁹ This is not to deny the importance of some publications, but they are very limited in number and have not devoted sufficient space for the discussion of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*. We may cite here for example *Political Ascent: Contemporary Islamic Movements in North Africa* by Emad Eldin Shahin and *l’Islamisme au Maghreb* (translated later under the title: *The Islamic Movement in North Africa*) by Francois Burgat, though the latter’s work was completed while *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* was still in its first stages. There are also some insightful articles by Michael Willis, Fransesco Cavatorta, John Entelis and others that we will refer to in this thesis.

¹⁰ In the preface to his book, *Islam and Revolution in the Middle East*, Henry Munson writes: “The biases of an author inevitably shape a book dealing with religious and political matters, and some of my own are probably already fairly clear. With respect to fundamentalist movements, I have no sympathy for anyone...” (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), p.ix.

¹¹ Some critics have pointed out to the fallacy of this idea. See, for example, John L. Esposito, “Moderate Muslims: A Mainstream of Modernists, Islamists, Conservatives, and Traditionalists,” in *Debating Moderate Islam*, ed. M. A. Muqtedar Khan (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2007), p.26.

¹² For example, this is how one writer starts his article: “Suddenly, a new term is foisted on us without serious debate or proof and we are supposed to rejoice at the triumphs of those now called “moderate Islamists.” The problem here is not just that I don’t believe such a thing exists but that no

case can be made that it does.” See Barry Rubin, “Moderate Islamism?” Does it Exist?” *PJ Media*, 31st October 2011, available at: <http://pjmedia.com/barryrubin>.

¹³ Gilles Kepel, *The Revenge of God: The Resurgence of Islam, Christianity and Judaism in the Modern World*, trans. from French by Alan Braley (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), p.4.

¹⁴ Abdulwahhab El-Affendi, “Islamic Movements: Establishment, Significance and Contextual Realities,” in *Islamic Movements: Impact on Political Stability in the Arab World* (Abu Dhabi: The Emirates Center For Strategic Studies and Research, ECSSR, 2003), p.7.

¹⁵ A similar remark is made by Emad Eldin Shahin. He speaks about what he describes as the “vertical” and the “horizontal” manifestations of the Islamic revival. See his book, *Political Ascent: Contemporary Islamic Movements in North Africa* (Oxford: Westview, 1998), p.2.

¹⁶ Gilles Kepel, p.13.

¹⁷ The reference here is to apolitical groups.

¹⁸ Ibrahim M. Abu Rabi`, ed. *Islamic Resurgence: Challenges, Directions and Future Perspectives: A Round Table with Khurshid Ahmed* (Tampa, Florida: World and Islam Studies Enterprise, 1994), p.54.

¹⁹ Hassan Hanafi, “Political Islam between Thought and Practice,” in *Islamic Movements: Impact on Political Stability in the Arab World*, p.55.

²⁰ For a more detailed discussion of *ijtihad*, see Ali Hasb Allah, *Usul at-Tashri` al-Islami*, 4th ed. [The Sources of Islamic Law] (Dar al-Ma`arif bi Misr, 1976), pp.79-108.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ahmad Bu`ud, *Al-Ijtihad byna Haqa`iqi at-Tarikh wa Mutatallabat al-Waqi`* [Ijtihad between the Truths of History and the Requirements of Reality] (Cairo: Daras-Salam, 2005), p.144.

²³ A saying of the Prophet narrated by Abu `Isa Muhammad ibn `Isa at-Tirmidhi, *Jami` at-Tirmidhi*, Book al-Fitan (Cairo: Dar al-Hadith, 1999), vol.4, p.214, *hadith* no. 2165; Abu Dawud Sulayman ibn al-Ash`ath al-Azdi as-Sijistani, *Sunan Abi Dawud*, Kitab al-Fitan wal-Malahim (Cairo: Dar al-Hadith, 1999), vol.4, p.1818, *hadith* no.4253; and Abu `Abdillah in Yazid ibn Majjah, *Sunan ibn Majjah*, Kitab al-Fitan, Bab as-Sawad al-A`dham (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-`Ilmiya, n.d.), vol.2, p.1303, *hadith* no.3950.

²⁴ R. Hrair Dekmejian, “The Anatomy of Islamic Revival: Legitimacy Crisis, Ethnic Conflict and the Search for Islamic Alternatives,” *Middle East Journal*, vol. 34, no. 1 (Winter, 1980), pp.1-12, available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4325967>

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ John L. Esposito, *Voices of Resurgent Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p.13.

²⁷ See Ziad Munson, “Islamic Mobilization: Social Theory and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood,” *The Sociological Quarterly*, vol. 42, no. 4 (Autumn, 2001), pp. 487-510, available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4121130> and also Gilles Kepel, p.19. Note that accounts differ on the size of the Brotherhood’s membership during that period and estimates range between half a million to two million.

²⁸ *Political Ascent: Contemporary Islamic Movements in North Africa*, p.11.

²⁹ John Esposito, “Islamic Revivalism,” *Occasional paper* (Washington, DC: The Middle East Institute, 1985), p. 14.

³⁰ John O. Voll, *Islam: Continuity and Change in the Modern World*, 2nd ed. (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1994), pp.379-380.

³¹ Bernard Lewis, “The Roots of Muslim Rage,” *The Atlantic Monthly* 266 (September 1990), pp.47-60.

³² Bernard Lewis, “The Enemies of God,” *The New York Review of Books* (25 March 1993), p.179.

³³ John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p.179.

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- ³⁴ See Fred Halliday, "Islamophobia Reconsidered," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 22, no. 5 (September 1999), pp.892-902.
- ³⁵ Quoted by John O. Voll, *Islam: Continuity and Change in the Modern World*, 2nd ed. p. 378.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.379.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*
- ³⁸ Olivier Roy, *The failure of Political Islam* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1994), p.x.
- ³⁹ Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*, trans. from French by Anthony F. Roberts (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002). See especially the introduction where he explains the phases through which the Islamic movement passed and how in the last decade of the 20th century it started, in his view, to disintegrate.
- ⁴⁰ Quoted by Gabriel Ben-Dor, *State and Conflict in the Middle East: Emergence of the Postcolonial State* (New York: Praeger, 1983), p. 35.
- ⁴¹ Roxanne L. Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Limits of Modern Rationalism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 163.
- ⁴² *Ibid.* p.6.
- ⁴³ R. Hrair Dekmejian, p.3.
- ⁴⁴ Shahin, pp.1-2.
- ⁴⁵ John O. Voll, p.4.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁷ Cited by Euben, p.5.
- ⁴⁸ Euben, p.4.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.7.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, p.23.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.28.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.48.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 36.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 42.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.36.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 157.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.36.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.43.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.42.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, p.39.
- ⁶³ Gilles Kepel, p.11.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁵ The conference was held in Istanbul on 1st and 2nd December 2012.
- ⁶⁶ He reiterated on many occasions that "a person who never evolves is like a lifeless stone."
- ⁶⁷ Tim May, *Social Research: Issues, Methods and Process*, 3rd ed. (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2001), p.124.
- ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.128.
- ⁶⁹ Quoted by Tim May, p.130.
- ⁷⁰ According to Freedom House, which compiles an annual report on the status of political rights and civil liberties, Morocco is classified among the countries regarded as "Partly Free" and where press status is "Not Free". See Freedom House, *Country Report: Morocco, 2011*, available at: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2011/morocco>.

⁷¹ The word *Makhzen* literally means “storehouse” where food used to be stored up. But the term became in the Moroccan Arabic synonymous with the ruling elite and now is often used to designate the archaic practices and aspects of the present Moroccan system of rule. For more detail see Muhammad Jadur, *Mu`assassat al-Makhzen fi Tarikh al-Maghrib* [The Makhzen Institution in the History of Morocco] Mu`assassat al-Malik abd-Al`aziz al-Saud, 2011), pp.42-45 & 383-462.

Chapter 2

¹ Francois Burgat, “Bilateral Radicalisation,” in *Power-Sharing Islam?* ed. Azzam Tamimi (London: Liberty for Muslim World Publications, 1993), p.43.

² Ben Barka was born in 1920 and disappeared under unknown circumstances in Paris on 29th October 1965. According to one theory his body was destroyed in a vat of acid. See other theories on his disappearance on: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mehdi_Ben_Barka.

³ See, for example, the memoirs of Mohamed Raiss, published in *al-Itihad al-Ichiraki Newspaper*, 23rd January – 2nd April, 2000; and Ahmed al-Marzouki’s memoirs published in a book entitled *Tazmamart, Cellule 10* (Paris: Editions Paris- Mediterranee, 2000).

⁴ Burgat, “Bilateral Radicalisation,” p.43.

⁵ Review of the Book, *Winning the Modern World for Islam* by Former German Ambassador to Morocco Dr. Murad Wilfried Hofmann, published by The Islamic Foundation and The International Institute of Islamic Thought, vol 21, no 3, April-June 2001; and Stephen O. Hughes, *Morocco under King Hassan* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 2001), p.295.

⁶ Muhammad Allal al-Fassi was born in Fes, Morocco, on 10th January 1910. He was one the founders and leaders of Istiqlal party. Besides being a politician, he was also a writer, poet, and Islamic scholar and has left several books. He died on 19th May 1974 during a visit to Romania. For more detail see Abderahim ben Slama, *Allal al-Fasi fi Adhakira* (Rabat: Aljam`iya al-Maghribiya li at-Tadamun al-Islami, 2009), pp.370-381.

⁷ Stephen O. Hughes, p.4.

⁸ I have drawn on great number of documents some of which have been published such the ones edited by Abd-Ali Majdoub, *At-Tanawub ala al-Hisar* [Under the House Arrest] (Oujda: Matbuat al-Hilal, 1999) and *Wa yastamiru al-Hisar* [On the Ongoing House Arrest] (Manchurat Safa Grafik, 2001), but others are still unpublished or awaiting publication such one prepared by Idriss Makboul. I have also benefited from informal talks and many interviews with senior members of the movement including Sheikh Yassine and Fath Allah Arsalan, the official spokesperson of the movement as well as other close childhood friends of A. Yassine such as Si Ali Socrate.

⁹ This is based on a series of unpublished interviews with Yassine conducted between 15th January 1989 and 11th June 1989.

¹⁰ Interview with Yassine in Rabat conducted on Friday, 06th May 2011 (slightly adapted).

¹¹ Abdessalam Yassine, *al-Islam aw at-Tufan* [Islam or the Deluge] (Marrakech: n.p., 1974), p.112.

¹² *Islam or the Deluge*, p.34.

¹³ Quoted in Francois Burgat and William Dowell, *The Islamic Movement in North Africa* (Austin: Centre for Middle Eastern Studies, 1997), pp.14-15. The book was originally written in French by Francois Burgat and first appeared as *L’Islamisme au Maghreb* (Paris: Carthala, 1988).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.15.

¹⁵ Interview with Yassine in Rabat conducted on Tuesday, 30th August 2011. For a more detailed account of his Sufi experience see also Abdessalam Yassine, *Al-Islam byna ad-Da’wa wa ad-Dawla* [Islam between the Call and the State] (Casablanca: Matba’at an-Najah, 1972.), pp.385-395.

¹⁶ Abdessalam Yassine, *Ihsan* [Spirituality], vol. 1 (Casablanca: Matbu’at al-Ufuq, 1998), p.28.

¹⁷ *Islam or the Deluge*, p.112.

¹⁸ *Islam or the Deluge*, p.34

¹⁹ See, for example, Malika Zeghal, *Islamism in Morocco: Religion, Authoritarianism and Electoral Politics*, trans. George Holoch (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2008), p.92.

²⁰ Quoted in Burgat and Dowell, *The Islamic Movement in North Africa*, p.16.

²¹ Zeghal, p.93.

²² See, for example, *Al-Minhaj an-Nabawi: Tarbiyatan wa Tandhiman was Zahfan*, 3rd ed. [The Prophetic Method: Socialization, Organization and Action] (Beirut: Asharika al-Arabiya al-Ifriqiya linashri wa at-Tawzia, 1994) and *Al-Adl: Al-Islamiyun wal-Hukm* [Justice: Islamists and Power] (Casablanca: Matbuat al-Ufuq, 2000).

²³ Hughes, p.298.

²⁴ *Political Ascent: Contemporary Islamic Movements in North Africa*, p.194.

²⁵ *Islam or The Deluge*, pp.31-32.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.82-83 [Passage translated in Hughes, p.95].

²⁷ Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz (682 – 720) is regarded as one of the greatest rulers in Muslim history to the extent that he is sometimes called the fifth Rightly Guided Caliph. What made him a much celebrated figure is that though he belonged to the reigning Umayyad family and was brought up in a luxurious, royal life, he experienced a deep transformation after which he became a very pious and virtuous man. When he was given the opportunity to rule, he told people publicly that they were free to elect anyone whom they liked. During his reign, though it only lasted two years and five months, he introduced substantial reforms which rendered that short period a truly bright and shining spot in a centuries-long history of hereditary authoritarian rule. For further details see, for example, Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Uthman Shams ad-Din Adhahabi, *Siyar A'lam an-Nubala* [The lives of Noble Figures] (Muassasat ar-Risala, 1985), vol.5, pp.115-147.

²⁸ *Islam or The Deluge*, Chapter II, pp.101-126.

²⁹ Michael C. Hudson, *Arab Politics: The Search for Legitimacy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977), p.52.

³⁰ *Political Ascent: Contemporary Islamic Movements in North Africa*, p.50.

³¹ For a detailed discussion of this issue, see Abelouahad Motaouakal, "An Assessment of the Relationship between the State and Religion in Moroccan Society," MA Thesis, Warwick University, UK, September 2003.

³² It was an ideology that was much in vogue at the time, especially among university students.

³³ Henry Munson, *Religion and Power in Morocco* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p.96.

³⁴ See Zeghal, p.79 and 97.

³⁵ Evan Christopher Anhorn, "Nasiha and Ideology: Evolution in Religious Authority in Post-Colonial Morocco," MA Thesis, Queen's University, Ontario, Canada, July 2010. See also Zeghal, p.84.

³⁶ Evan Christopher Anhorn, p. 37.

³⁷ Evan Christopher Anhorn, p. 37. For more detail see Henry Munson, *Religion and Power in Morocco*.

³⁸ See Hughes, p.213.

³⁹ The reference here is to the following saying of the Prophet: "The best of all martyrs is Hamza ibn Abd-al-Mutalib, and a man who stood up in the face of an oppressive ruler to enjoin and forbid him and was killed by him." See Abu Abdu-Allah Muhammad ibn Abdu-Allah al-Hakim an-Naysaburi, *Al-Mustadrak alaa as-Sahihain* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Imiya, 1995), vol.3, p.215, *hadith* no.4884. In another *hadith* it is reported that a man asked Prophet Muhammad: "Which type of *Jihad* is the best?" He answered: "A word of truth against a tyrant ruler." See Imam Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Hanbal, *Al-Musnad* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1991), vol.6, p.471, *hadith* no. 18852; and see also *Sunan ibn Majjah*, Kitab al-Fitan, vol.2, p.1330, *hadith* no.4012.

⁴⁰ Burgat and Dowell, pp.172-173.

⁴¹ He spoke about this idea on various occasions. See, for instance, his answer to the question why he had not joined one of the groups that were already in place in *al-Jama'a*, no. 1 (March – May 1979), pp. 109-110.

⁴² Reported from 'Aisha by Imam Abu al-Husayn Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj an-Naysaburi, *Sahih Muslim*, Kitab al-Bir wa as-Silah wa al-Adab: Bab Fadl ar-Rifq (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiya, n.d.), vol. 16, p. 146, *hadith* no. 2593.

⁴³ These principles and ideas are not raised in this order in *Al-Minhaj an-Nabawi* [*The Prophetic Method*], and they are further developed in other Yassine's writings and speeches.

Chapter 3

¹ This joke is told in slight different ways but the basic message remains the same. See, for example, Stephen O. Hughes, p.109.

² C. Daure-Serfaty, *Rencontres avec le Maroc* (Paris: La Decouverte, 1993), p.145.

³ Quoted in Burgat and Dowell, *The Islamic Movement in North Africa*, p.16.

⁴ *Islam or the Deluge*, p.32.

⁵ Eva Wegner, *Islamist Opposition in Authoritarian Regimes: The Party of Justice and Development in Morocco* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2011), p.2.

⁶ Mahjoub Tobji, *Les officiers de Sa Majesté : Les dérives des généraux marocains 1956-2006* (Paris: Fayard, 2006), p. 6.

⁷ C. R. Pennell, *Morocco since 1830: A History* (London: Hurst and Company, 2000), p.361.

⁸ *Political Ascent: Contemporary Islamic Movements in North Africa*, p.54-55.

⁹ See Mark A. Tesler, "Image and Reality in Moroccan Political Economy," in *The Political Economy of Morocco*, ed. I. William Zartman (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1987), p 221; see also Stephen O. Hughes, p.349.

¹⁰ In *Islamism in Morocco*, Malika Zeghal claims that Yassine's Journal "called on all Moroccan Islamist groups to unite around [him], an attempt that met with failure (see p.120)." This author has not found a single piece of evidence in all of the sixteen issues that substantiate explicitly or implicitly such a claim. Errors of the sort are not rare in her book, in addition to instances of mistranslation and mis-readings of Yassine's writings. See, for example, p. 98 and see how she translates the first paragraph of Yassine's *Islam or the Deluge*.

¹¹ Abdessalam Yassine, *Al-Minhaj an-Nabawi: Tarbiyatan wa Tandhiman wa Zahfan*, 3rd ed. [*The Prophetic Method: Socialization, Organization and Action*], p.25.

¹² Majdoub, ed., *At-Tanawub ala al-Hisar* [*Under the House Arrest*], p.91.

¹³ Ibid. p.92. The text of this message is accessible on this site:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20031206142802/http://www.habous.gov.ma/dorrou/Eng/index.htm>

¹⁴ *Al-Jamaa*, n.10, 1982.

¹⁵ Abd al-Karim al-Alami, "Murshid Jam'at al-Adl wal-Ihsan: A Short Biography," unpublished document, 1992.

¹⁶ William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. by T. J. B. Spencer (London: Penguin Books, 1996), II. 2. 86.

¹⁷ [On the reasons for choosing a new name], unpublished document issued on 2nd *Dhi al-Hijja* 1407 / 28th July 1987, [translation mine].

¹⁸ *Quran*, Surah The Bee, no.16, verse 90.

¹⁹ [On the reasons for choosing a new name], unpublished document quoted above.

²⁰ "Murshid Jam'at al-adl wal-Ihsan: A Short Biography," unpublished document, 1992.

²¹ “*Majlis al-Irshad*” is a term first used by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and translated in various ways: Guidance Council, Executive Council, etc... It was adopted by *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* and entrusted to guide and follow up the activities of the movement.

²² *At-Tanawub ala al-Hisar* [*Under the House Arrest*], p.95.

²³ Willis points out that the regime was convinced that “Yassine and *al-Adl* were not willing to be co-opted.” See “Justice and Development or Justice and Spirituality? The Challenge of Morocco’s Nonviolent Islamist Movements,” in *The Maghrib in the New Century: Identity, Religion, and Politics*, p.157.

²⁴ www.referenceforbusiness.com/, accessed 15th May 2011.

²⁵ “Murshid Jam’at al-adl wal-Ihsan: A Short Biography,” unpublished document, 1992.

²⁶ Abdessalam Yassine, *Memoire, a qui de droit* [*Memorandum: To Whom It May Concern*] (n.p. 2000), p.1.

²⁷ As an example, see The Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs, *Nakdh Mudhakira ila man Yahumuh al-Amr* [Refutation of *Memorandum: To Whom It May Concern*] (Al-Muhammadiya: Matba’at Fdhala, [2000]), p.75; see also Muhammad Yassaf, “tadhkira min Jam’iyat al-Ulama li Sahibi Mudhira ila man Yahumuh al-Amr [A Note from Ulama Association to the author of *Memorandum: To Whom It May Concern*,” *At-Tajdid* newspaper, Issue no.63, 05th April 2000.

²⁸ In a press conference held in his house on 21st May 2009, Fath-Allah Arsalan, the movement spokesman, talked about these negotiations in more detail. See “Al-adl wal-Ihsan Takshifu ‘an Mufawadatitha as-Siriya ma’a ad-Dawla” [*Al-Adl* reveals its secret negotiations with the State], in *Al-Massae* newspaper, 23/24 May 2009, no.831.

²⁹ Majdoub, ed., *Wa yastamiru al-Hisar* [*On the Ongoing House Arrest*], p.95.

³⁰ *Ibid.* pp.65-70.

³¹ This is a colloquial name for a member belonging to the Moroccan Auxiliary Forces (Forces Auxiliaires Marocaines, FAM), a paramilitary force which supports the police and the army when necessary and follows the command of the Ministry of the Interior.

³² Interview with Fath Allah Arsalan, the official spokesman of the movement, August 2012. The incident is also reported in *Wa yastamiru al-Hisar* [*On the Ongoing House Arrest*], p. 113.

³³ *Wa yastamiru al-Hisar* [*On the Ongoing House Arrest*], p.93.

³⁴ See Anouar Boukhars, *Politics in Morocco: Executive Monarchy and Enlightened Authoritarianism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), p.49.

³⁵ See, for example, Zeghal, p.93; and see also Avi Spiegel, “The Unknown Moroccan Islamists,” *Foreign Policy*, 13th June 2011, available at:

http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/06/13/the_unknown_moroccan_islamists

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.92-93.

³⁷ See for example Okacha Ben al-Mustapha, *Al-Islamiyuna fil-Maghreb* (Casablanca: Dar Toubkal lin-Nachr, 2008), pp.77-84.

³⁸ Mohsine El-Ahmadi, *Le mouvement Yassiniste* (El-Mohamadia: Imprimerie de Fedala, 2006), pp.28-31.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.30.

⁴⁰ *Al-Minhaj an-Nabawi*, p.10.

⁴¹ Interview with Fath Allah Arsalan, August 2012.

⁴² All the information concerning the structure of the movement is based on unpublished documents used for the first time and to comply with research ethics, consent of the movement leadership has been obtained.

⁴³ Interview with Fath Allah Arsalan, August 2012.

⁴⁴ eeS Amnesty International, *Annual Report 2011: Morocco/Western Sahara* available at: www.amnesty.org/en/region/moroccowestern-sahara/report-2011; Human Rights Watch, “Morocco:

Arrests, Alleged Torture of Islamist Movement Figures,” 1st September 2010, available at : www.hrw.org/news/2010/09/01/morocco-arrests-alleged-torture-islamist-movement-figures; and Alkarama, “Maroc: La situation des droits de l’homme connait une grave derive,” 26 Aout 2012, available at: http://fr.alkaram.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=812&Itemid=99.⁴⁵ Muhammad Tozy, *Monarchie et islam politique au Maroc* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 1999), p.199 and p.215; see also Kassem Bahaji, “Moroccan Islamists: Between Integration, Confrontation and Ordinary Muslims,” *Middle East Review of International Affairs [MERIA]*, vol.15, no.1 (March 2011), p.44.⁴⁶ Tawfiq Bouachrine, interview by Leila ash-Shikhli, *Ma wara`a al-Khabar*, Al-Jazeera TV, Doha: 03rd June 2007, Television.

Chapter 4

¹ For more detail see Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, *Al-Ijtihad fi Ashari`ah al-Islamiyya* (Kuweit: Dar al-Kalam li an-Nashr wa at-Tawzia, 1989). The whole book is devoted to the subject. See also Sheikh Taha Jabir Al-Alwani, *Issues in Contemporary Islamic Thought* (London; Washington: The International Institute of Islamic thought, 2005), pp.65-69.

² Quoted in Sheikh Taha Jabir Al-Alwani, *Issues in Contemporary Islamic Thought*, p.68.

³ Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p.43.

⁴ Abdessalam Yassine, *Nadharat fil al-Fikh wat-Tarikh* [Notes on Jurisprudence and History] (Beirut: Asharika al-Oropiyya al-Lubnaniyya lin-Nashr, 1990), pp.15-16.

⁵ *Ibid.*, see, for example, pp.11-12 and p.29.

⁶ For more detail see Abdessalam Yassine, *Imamat al-Umma* [The leadership of the (Islamic) *Umma*] (Dar Lubnan lit-Tibaa wan-Nashr, 2009) pp.207-242.

⁷ *Imamat al-Umma* [The leadership of the (Islamic) *Umma*], p.233.

⁸ Abdessalam Yassine, *Al-Minhaj an-Nabawi: Tarbiyatan wa Tandhiman was Zahfan*, 3rd ed. [The Prophetic Method: Socialization, Organization and Action], p.208; and see also *Imamat al-Umma* [The leadership of the (Islamic) *Umma*], p.239.

⁹ See, for example, Yusef Qaradawi’s book, *Ijtihad fi Shari`ah Al-Islamiyah* [Ijtihad in Islamic *Shari`ah*], especially pp.114-133.

¹⁰ *Imamat al-Umma* [The leadership of the (Islamic) *Umma*], p.212.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.215.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.31.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.215.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.216.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.212.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.233.

¹⁷ Yassine, *Nadharat fil al-Fikh wat-Tarikh* [Notes on Jurisprudence and History], p.84.

¹⁸ Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, *Al-Ijtihad fi Ashari`ah al-Islamiyya*, pp.198-184

¹⁹ In a recent book entitled *Islamic Activists* by Deina Ali Abdelkader, she states that “the works of Qaradawi, Yassine, and Ghannouchi seem to agree on the importance of *ijtihad*,” but a few paragraphs later, she writes:

Yassine’s arguments appear to contain some internal contradictions... On one hand, he agrees with Ghannouchi and Qaradawi that ...intellectuals with different areas of specialization should all participate. On the other hand, Yassine also cautions that intellectuals could utilize reason/*ijtihad* to reject the textual sources of Islamic law as did

the Mu'tazilites. A second contradiction in Yassine's writings lies in his stress on the necessity of Islamic legal training before a person should delve into *Ijtihad*. If only the credentialed qualify, the institutions of higher education would de facto monopolize *ijtihad* [p.110].

I have read most of Qaradawi's works and I am also familiar with the writings of Gannouchi and I can safely argue that their positions do not differ from Yassine's in this respect. To make sure of this, it is enough to refer to Qaradawi's book, *Ijtihad fi Shari'ah Al-Islamiyah (Ijtihad in Islamic Shari'ah)*. Indeed, it is a position endorsed by most, if not all, moderate Islamic reformers across the Muslim world.

²⁰ Ibid., p.83.

²¹ Quoted in *Imamat al-Umma* [The leadership of the (Islamic) *Umma*], p.240.

²² Yassine, *Nadharat fil al-Fikh wat-Tarikh* [Notes on Jurisprudence and History], p.83.

²³ Ibid., p.83.

²⁴ Quoted in *Nadharat fil al-Fikh wat-Tarikh*, p.81; the writer referred to is Hassan Hanafi and his book, *At-Turath wat-Tajdid: Mauqifuna min at-Turath al-Qadim* [Heritage and Innovation: Our Attitude towards the Legacy of the Past] (Al-Mu'assasa al-Iami'ya lid-dirasat wa an-Nash wa at-Tawzi', 1992).

²⁵ Abdessalam Yassine, *Tanweer al-Muminat* [The Enlightenment of Women] (Tanta: Dar al-Bashir li Athakafa wal-Ulum, n.d.), pp.115.

²⁶ This idea will be elaborated further in Chapter 7.

²⁷ *Nadharat fil al-Fikh wat-Tarikh* [Notes on Jurisprudence and History], pp.33-41.

²⁸ See, for example, these two books by Sayyid Abū al-Alā Mawlana Mawdudi, *Four Key Concepts of the Quran* (Markfield, Leics.: Islamic Foundation, 2006) and *Al-Islam wal-Jahiliyya*, 2nd ed. (Dar At-Turath Al-Arabi, 1980).

²⁹ Sayyid Qutb, *Maalim fit-Tariq* [Milestones] (Beirut; Damascus: The Holy Koran Publishing House, 1398/1978), pp.21-22.

³⁰ Generally *bid'ah* refers to anything which is not sanctioned by Islam.

³¹ Yassine, *Tanweer al-Muminat* [The Enlightenment of Women], pp.116-117.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., p.118.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid; the quoted verse is from the Quran, 13: 11.

³⁶ Hamid Barrada, "Le vrai visage du cheikh Yassine," in *Jeune Afrique*, 19 March 2007; available at: <http://www.jeunefrique.com/Article/LIN18037levraenissa0>; last accessed 04 December 2011. See also Wendy Kristianasen, "Can Morocco's Islamists check al-Qaida?" *Le Monde Diplomatique*, August 2007; available at: <http://www.mondediplo.com/2007/08/06morocco>; last accessed 04 December 2011.

³⁷ Reported from 'Aisha by Muslim in his *Sahih*, Kitab al-Bir wa as-Silah wa al-Adab: Bab Fadl ar-Rifq, vol. 16, p. 146, *hadith* no. 2593.

³⁸ From a speech addressed to a gathering of women and men on 14th March 2004 (my translation).

³⁹ Yassine, *Al-Adl: Al-Islamiyun wal-Hukm* [Justice: Islamists and Power], pp. 46-47.

⁴⁰ Yassine, *Al-Ihsan*, vol.1, p.17.

⁴¹ Quoted in Yassine, *Al-Ihsan*, vol.1, p.17.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., pp.22-23.

⁴⁴ See, for example, Said ibn Muhammad Halim, *Jama'at al-Adl wal-Ihsan: Qira'a fi al-Khafiya al-Fikriya* [Jama'at al-Adl wal-Ihsan: A reading of its Intellectual Background] (Fez: Info-Print, 2007).

⁴⁵ Yassine, *Al- Ihsan*, vol.1, p. 23.

⁴⁶ *Sahih Muslim*, the Book of Faith, vol.1, pp.157-160.

⁴⁷ Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam* (St. Paul Minnesota: Paragon House, 1994), p.xxvi.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.xxvii.

⁴⁹ Abdessalam Yassine, *Winning the Modern World for Islam*, trans. from French by Martin Jenni (Iowa City: Justice and Spirituality Publishing, 2000), p.111. This translation is used throughout this thesis.

⁵⁰ *The Vision of Islam*, p.xxxii.

⁵¹ Hassan El-Najjar, "Three Levels of Faith: Islam, Iman, and Ihsan," *Al-Jazeera*, 21st May 2007, available at: <http://www.aljazeera.info/Islamiceditorials>; last accessed 30 November 2011.

⁵² *Winning the Modern World for Islam*, p.112.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

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Chapter 5.

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- ³² Abdessalam Yassine, *Winning the Modern World for Islam*, p.156.
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- ³⁹ Robert A. Dahl, *Democracy and its Critics* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), p.221.
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- ⁴⁴ Elie Kedourie, p.5.
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- ⁴⁹ Maddy-Weitzman, "Islamism, Moroccan-Style: the Ideas of Sheikh Yassine," *Middle East Quarterly*, vol.10, no.1 (2003).
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- ⁵² See for example the section titled "Obligation of Opposition" in *Justice*, pp.134-139.
- ⁵³ *Winning the Modern World for Islam*, p.154.
- ⁵⁴ Yassine, *Mémoire, à qui de droit* [Memorandum: To Whom It May Concern]. (n.p., 2000), p.35.
- ⁵⁵ Maddy-Weitzman, quoted above.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid.
- ⁵⁷ This idea will be elaborated further in Chapter 7.
- ⁵⁸ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Marxism: An Interpretation* (London: SCM Press 1953), pp. 9-10.
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- ⁶⁴ Malcolm Waters, vol.1, p.xiv.
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- ⁶⁹ Miles Ogborn, *Spaces of Modernity: London's Geographies, 1680-1780* (New York ; London: Guilford Press, 1998) p.10.
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- ⁷³ See, for example, Malcolm Waters, vol.1, p.xiii.
- ⁷⁴ Octavio Paz, "In Search of the Present," (Nobel Lecture, December 8, 1990), available at http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1990/paz-lecture.html.
- ⁷⁵ *Winning the Modern World for Islam*, p.xiv.

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- ⁷⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid., p.xv.
- ⁷⁸ Ibid.
- ⁷⁹ Ibid., p.3.
- ⁸⁰ Ibid.
- ⁸¹ Ibid.
- ⁸² Alain Touraine, *Critique of Modernity*, trans. David Macey (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1995), p.10.
- ⁸³ *Winning the Modern World for Islam*, p.4.
- ⁸⁴ Ibid.
- ⁸⁵ Ibid.
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- ⁸⁷ Zygmunt Bauman, "Modernity" in *The Oxford Companion to the Politics of the World*, 2nd ed., edited by Joel Krieger (Oxford University Press, 2001), available at *Oxford Reference Online*, Oxford University Press, University of Exeter, 11 April 2012
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- ⁸⁸ *Winning the Modern World for Islam*, p.8.
- ⁸⁹ Ibid.
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- ⁹¹ *The Formations of Modernity*, vol.1, p.11.
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- ⁹³ Ibid.
- ⁹⁴ Ibid.
- ⁹⁵ Ibid.
- ⁹⁶ Felix Guattari, Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton, *The Three Ecologies* (London: The Athlone Press, 2000), p.29.
- ⁹⁷ *The Formations of Modernity*, vol.1, p.17.
- ⁹⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹⁹ *Winning the Modern World for Islam*, p.10.
- ¹⁰⁰ Ibid.
- ¹⁰¹ See, for example, Dominic Sachsenmaier, Jens Riedel and Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, eds., *Reflections on Multiple Modernities: European, Chinese and Other Interpretations* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).
- ¹⁰² *Winning the Modern World for Islam*, p.16. [Note that this was written in 1998, before anything about what is called the Arab Spring transpired.]
- ¹⁰³ Ibid., p.14.
- ¹⁰⁴ The reference here is to the tragic events that followed the suspension of elections in Algeria in 1992.
- ¹⁰⁵ *Winning the Modern World for Islam*, p.16.
- ¹⁰⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p.17.
- ¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p.13.
- ¹⁰⁹ Ibid.
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- ¹¹¹ Fatima Harrak, "The History and Significance of the Moroccan Family Code," Institute for the Study of Islamic thought in Africa (ISITA), *Working Papers* no. 09-002 (March 2009).
- ¹¹² Ibid.
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¹¹⁴ Ahmad b. Hanbal, *Al-Musnad*, vol.9, p.128, *hadith* no.23548.

¹¹⁵ Quoted in 'Aisha Bewly, *Islam: The Empowering of Women* (London: TA-HA Publishers, 1999), p.8.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.2.

¹¹⁷ Abdessalam Yassine, *Tanweer al-Muminat [The Enlightenment of Women]*, p.21.

¹¹⁸ See Taha Hussein, *Mustaqbal a-Thaqafa fi Misr [The Future of Culture in Egypt]* (Cairo: 1938), pp. 4-44. Quoted in Michael Youssef, *Revolt against Modernity: Muslim Zealots and the West* (Leiden : Brill, 1985), p.58.

¹¹⁹ *Winning the Modern World for Islam*, p.93.

¹²⁰ Morocco was ranked 91 out of 177 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2013 Corruption Perceptions Index. See <http://www.transparency.org> .

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p.155.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p.94.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ The reference here is to the verse in which the Quran says: "For Muslim men and women, for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for true men and women, for men and women who are patient and constant, for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give in charity, for men and women who fast, for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who engage much in God's praise, for them has God prepared forgiveness and great reward." (*Surat 33, Verse 35*).

¹²⁵ To read more about ash-Shifa, see Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, *Al-Isaba fi Tamyiz as-Sahaba [A comprehensive Dictionary of the Companions]* (Beirut: Daral-Jil, 1412), vol.7, pp.728-727.

¹²⁶ Interview with Fathallah Arsalan, official spokesman of the movement and MGC, conducted 7th April 2012.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ Interview with Nadia Yassine, *Arab Reform Bulletin*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, July 2006.

¹³¹ For further discussion of this point see Yassine, *Imamat al-Umma [The Leadership of Umma]*, pp.12-42.

¹³² *Winning the Modern World for Islam*, pp.94-95.

Chapter 6.

¹ Pennell, *Morocco since 1830: A History*, p.291.

² *Ibid.*, p.299.

³ For further discussion why the king was pressed to set up the police and the armed forces see Lise Storm, *Democratization in Morocco : The Political Elite and Struggles for Power in the Post-Independence State* (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon ; New York : Routledge, 2007), p.15.

⁴ One of these purposes is to use them to play off against one another the various political groups. See for further detail: Octave Marais, "The Ruling Class in Morocco," in *Man, State, and Society in the Contemporary Maghrib*, edited by I. William Zartman (London: Pall Mall Press, 1973), p.187.

⁵ Marvine Howe, *Morocco: The Islamist Awakening and other Challenges* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.98.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.79.

⁷ It is said that members of the Party leadership exhorted Ben Barka not to give the whole report, so he was compelled to present only part of it. See a footnote in Mohamed Chakir, *Al-Fikr as-Siyasi al-*

Maghribi al-Muasir [The Contemporary Moroccan Political Thought] (Casablanca: Afriqiya ash-Shark, 2005), p.205.

⁸ El-Mehdi Ben Barka, *The Political Thought of Ben Barka: I: Revolutionary Option in Morocco; II: Political Articles* (Havana: Tricontinental, 1968), p.83.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.24.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.48.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.36.

¹² *Rencontres avec le Maroc*, p.180.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.19.

¹⁴ *Morocco: The Islamist Awakening and other Challenges*, p.96.

¹⁵ Ben Barka, p.19.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.35.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.40.

¹⁸ The reference here is to the negotiations, held in Aix-les-Bains in France in August 1955 between the French government and Moroccan representatives, which led to Morocco's independence. See C.R. Pennell, pp.288-289.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.47.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.49.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, p.50.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.62-63.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.66.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.63.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.53.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.60.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.70.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.71.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.71.

³² *Ibid.*, p.74.

³³ Rom Landau, *Morocco Independent under Mohammed the Fifth* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1961), p.71.

³⁴ Hassan II ; Eric Lauent, *La mémoire d'un Roi: Entretiens avec Eric Laurent* (Paris: Plon, 1993), p.108.

³⁵ Rom Landau, p.71.

³⁶ *Morocco: The Islamist Awakening and other Challenges*, p.98.

³⁷ Mohamed Darif, *Al-ahzab as-Siyasiya al-Maghribiya 1934-1999 [Moroccan Political Parties from 1934 to 1999]* (Casablanca: Manshurat al-Majalla al-Maghribiya li- Ilm al-Ijtima' as-Siyasi, 2001), p.129.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.111.

³⁹ Hughes, *Morocco under King Hassan*, p.142.

⁴⁰ *Al-ahzab as-Siyasiya al-Maghribiya 1934-1999 [Moroccan Political Parties from 1934 to 1999]*, p.129.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.130; and see also I. William Zartman, "Political Pluralism in Morocco" in *Man, State, and Society in the Contemporary Maghrib*, p.254.

⁴² Ben Barka, p.83.

⁴³ Rom Landau, p.79.

⁴⁴ It is reported that Abdelkrim Motii, founder of the Islamic Youth Association in 1969, was a former member of Ben Barka's UNFP party and that he broke with the left, claiming that they were Communists and atheists. See *Morocco: The Islamist Awakening and other Challenges*, p.127.

⁴⁵ USFP, *The Ideological Report and other Documents of the Extraordinary Convention*, held in Casablanca in January 1975, 2nd ed. (Rabat: 1978), p.44. [Note: The translation of this as well as the following quotations is mine.]

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* and p.152.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.22.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.25.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.55.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.54 and p.65. Note: The Algeciras Conference was held in Algeciras, Spain, in 1906. The claimed purpose of the conference was to find a solution to the Crisis between France and Germany over the status of Morocco. To know more about this conference, see Abdelkarim al-Filali, *At-Tarikh as-Siyasi lil Maghrib al-Arabi al-Kabir* [The Political History of the Great Arab Maghrib] (Cairo: Sharika Nass lit-Tiba'a, 2006), vol.6, pp.73-96.

⁵¹ USFP, *The Ideological Report and other Documents of the Extraordinary Convention*, pp.67-68.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p.98.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp.98-99.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.100.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.137-38.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.140.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.142.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.144.

⁵⁹ See *Al-ahzab as-Siyasiya al-Maghribiya 1934-1999* [Moroccan Political Parties from 1934 to 1999], pp.159-160.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ USFP, *The Ideological Report and other Documents of the Extraordinary Convention*, p.222.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.148.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.149.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ In an interview with this author in December 2013, Mohamed Sassi, former leading member of USFP, pointed out that this statement, though rarely referred to, is of special importance in the history of the USFP. The full text of this statement is available in *Al-Itihad al-Ishtiraki lil Quwat ash-Sha'biya, Mina Al-Itihad al-Watani ila Al-Itihad al-Ishtiraki, 1959-1974: Watha'iq* [USFP, *From UNFP to USFP, 1959-1974: Documents*] (Casablanca: Dar an-Nash al-Maghribiya, n.d.), pp.147-155.

⁶⁸ Preparatory Committee for the third convention of the USFP, Report on the activities of the USFP, covering 4 years: 1975-1978, p.9; quoted in *Al-ahzab as-Siyasiya al-Maghribiya 1934-1999* [Moroccan Political Parties from 1934 to 1999], p.163.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.10.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.11 and p.17; in *Al-ahzab as-Siyasiya*, p.164.

⁷¹ See the political report delivered by Bouabid at the USFP's third national convention in *Al-Itihad al-Ishtiraki lil Quwat ash-Sha'biya, Mawaqif Mabda'iya wa Qararat Dharfiya: Almu'tamar al-Watani Thalith 1978*, 2nd ed. [Principled stances and decisions suitable to the circumstances: 3rd national convention, 1978] (Casablanca: Dar an-Nash al-Maghribiya, 1984), pp.13-14.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p.19.

⁷³ Preparatory Committee for the third convention of the USFP, Report on the activities of the USFP, covering 4 years: 1975-1978, p.47; quoted in *Al-ahzab as-Siyasiya al-Maghribiya 1934-1999* [Moroccan Political Parties from 1934 to 1999], p.166.

⁷⁴ Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, V., "Report on the Unity Congress of the R.S.D.L.P.," 1906, available at: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1906/rucong/viii.htm>, accessed 21st October 2012.

⁷⁵ Preparatory Committee for the third convention of the USFP, Report on the activities of the USFP, covering 4 years: 1975-1978, pp.47-49; quoted in *Al-ahzab as-Siyasiya al-Maghribiya 1934-1999* [Moroccan Political Parties from 1934 to 1999], p.167.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.48.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.49.

⁷⁸ This view is expressed by Mohamed Tozy to the Moroccan weekly *La vie Economique*, quoted in Anouar Bouhkars, *Politics in Morocco: Executive Monarchy and Enlightened Authoritarianism* (London: Routledge 2011), p.102.

⁷⁹ Quoted in Anouar Bouhkars, p.101.

⁸⁰ Interview with this author in Rabat in December 2013.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.97.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.97-98.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.102.

⁸⁷ Noam Chomsky, "Destroying the Commons: How the Magna Carta Became a Minor Carta," *Aljazeera*, 27 July 2012, available at: <http://aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion>, last accessed 17 October 2012.

⁸⁸ Gene Sharp, *From Dictatorship to Democracy: A Conceptual Framework for Liberation*, 4th ed. (East Boston, MA: The Albert Einstein Institution, 2010), p.10, [Online copy].

Chapter 7

¹ Abdessalam Yassine, *Al-Adl: Al-Islamiyun wal-Hukm* [Justice: Islamists and Power], p.680.

² Abdessalam Yassine, *Winning the Modern World for Islam*, p.152.

³ Francesco Cavatorta may be the first who has thus described the strategy of al-Adl. See his article, "Neither Participation nor Revolution: The Strategy of the Moroccan *Jamiat al-Adl wal-Ihsan*," *Mediterranean Politics*, vol.12, no.3 (2007), pp.381-397.

⁴ Abdessalam Yassine, *Nadharat fil al-Fikh wat-Tarikh* [Notes on Jurisprudence and History], p.10; and see also another of his books titled, *Al-Khilafa wal-Mulk* [The Caliphate and Monarchy] (Dar al-Afak, 2000), pp.68-71.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Yassine, *Al-Adl: Al-Islamiyun wal-Hukm* [Justice: Islamists and Power], p.47.

⁷ *Ibid.*, and see also *Nadharat fil al-Fikh wat-Tarikh* [Notes on Jurisprudence and History], p.10.

⁸ Yassine, *Al-Adl: Al-Islamiyun wal-Hukm* [Justice: Islamists and Power], pp.46-47.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.246.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* and Abdessalam Yassine, *Tanweer al-Muminat* [The Enlightenment of Women], vol.1, p.29.

¹¹ Yassine, *Al-Adl: Al-Islamiyun wal-Hukm* [Justice: Islamists and Power], p.247.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.553.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp.553-58.

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- ¹⁴ For a discussion on how some nations have dealt with the notion of defeat, see Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning and Recovery*, trans. Jefferson Chase (London: Granta Books, 2004).
- ¹⁵ Yassine, *Al-Adl: Al-Islamiyun wal-Hukm* [Justice: Islamists and Power], p.247.
- ¹⁶ *The Meaning of the Glorious Quran*, with an Explanatory Translation by Muhammad Marmduke Pickthal (New York: Mentor Books, n.d.), 16: 125.
- ¹⁷ *Quran*, 23: 96.
- ¹⁸ *Quran*, 4: 128.
- ¹⁹ Reported from 'Aisha and Jabir ibn Abdullah respectively by Muslim in his *Sahih*, Kitab al-Bir was-Silah wal-Adab: Bab Fadl ar-Rifk, vol.16, pp.145-146, *hadith* nos. 2593 and 2592.
- ²⁰ Abdessalam Yassine, *Mémoire, à qui de droit* [Memorandum: To Whom It May Concern] (n.p., 2000), p.31.
- ²¹ Yassine, *Al-Adl: Al-Islamiyun wal-Hukm* [Justice: Islamists and Power], p.172.
- ²² *Ibid.*, p.174. Note: Yassine "insists on active patience and resistance" to rule out any idea of submission or indifference. See *Winning the Modern World for Islam*, p.149.
- ²³ Abdessalam Yassine, *Al-Minhaj an-Nabawi: Tarbiyatan wa Tandhiman was Zahfan*, 3rd ed. [The Prophetic Method: Socialization, Organization and Action], p.271.
- ²⁴ Yassine, *Al-Adl: Al-Islamiyun wal-Hukm* [Justice: Islamists and Power], p.507.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.508.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.599.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.676.
- ²⁸ *Winning the Modern World for Islam*, p.113.
- ²⁹ Yassine, *Al-Adl: Al-Islamiyun wal-Hukm* [Justice: Islamists and Power], p.147.
- ³⁰ Yassine, *Al-Minhaj an-Nabawi: Tarbiyatan wa Tandhiman was Zahfan*, 3rd ed. [The Prophetic Method: Socialization, Organization and Action], p.206.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, p.277.
- ³² *Ibid.*, p.221.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, p.220.
- ³⁴ Yassine, *Al-Adl: Al-Islamiyun wal-Hukm* [Justice: Islamists and Power], p.513.
- ³⁵ Discussion with a senior member of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* movement, 20th August 2012.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*
- ³⁷ Yassine, *Al-Adl: Al-Islamiyun wal-Hukm* [Justice: Islamists and Power], p.628.
- ³⁸ Abdessalam Yassine, *Imamat al-Umma* [The leadership of the (Islamic) *Umma*], p.32.
- ³⁹ John Overt Voll, *Islam: Continuity and Change in the Modern World*, p.1.
- ⁴⁰ Graham E. Fuller, "The Future of Political Islam," *Foreign Affairs*, vol.81, no.2 (Mar. – Apr., 2002), p.50.
- ⁴¹ In one *hadith* the Prophet says: "There will be prophethood with you as long as God wills ... , then there will be caliphate on the pattern of the prophethood and will remain as long as God wills it, ... then there will be (a period of) autocratic rule and it will remain as long as God wills it... and then ... it will be removed. Then there will be oppressive government for as long as God wills it and then ... He will take it away to be followed by a caliphate on the pattern of the prophethood ..." See Imam Ahmad, *Musnad Imam Ahmed*, vol.6, p.384, *hadith* no.18434.
- ⁴² It is reported that General Amir Hossein Rabbi, Commander-in-chief of the Iranian Air Force said prior to his execution that Washington "took the Shah by the tail and threw him into exile like a dead rat." See Said Amir Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p.114.
- ⁴³ Some of his interviews have been edited by Hassan Benajah and published in book form under the title, *Attitudes of al-Adl wal-Ihsan through its Spokesman Fath-Allah Arsalan* (Tetwan: Matba'at

al-Khalij, 2005); others are available in full text on the website of the movement: <http://www.aljamaa.net>

⁴⁴ Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore, Md.; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), p.37.

⁴⁵ Barry R. Weingast, "Democratic Stability as a Self-enforcing Equilibrium," in *Understanding Democracy: Political and Economic Perspectives*, ed. by Albert Breton et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.34.

⁴⁶ *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*, p.38.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Abdessalam Yassine, *Shura wa ad-Dimuqratiyya* [Shura and Democracy] (Casablanca: Matba`at al-Ufuq, 1996), p.339.

⁴⁹ This analysis is shared by many writers. See, for example, Tawfiq Bouachrine, "Hal Yansa Benkirane Nata`ij al-Intikhabat wa law Mu`akatan?" [Can Benkirane forget for a while the results of the elections?], published on Tuesday, 03rd September 2013, available at: <http://hespress.com/writers/880177.htm>

⁵⁰ Unpublished document produced by the Movement's Political Section "On the reasons for calling for a pact".

⁵¹ As the exact number of eligible voters is not available, estimates tend to differ, with figures ranging from 21 to 25 million. See, for example, National Democratic Institute (NDI), "Final Report on the Moroccan Legislative Elections", 25th November 2011, available at: www.ndi.org/files/Morocco-Final-Election-Report; and "A`dadu al-Musajalin fi al-law`ih al-Intikhabiya byna 2007 wa 2011" [The number of registered voters between 2007 and 2011], published on Monday, 2nd November 2011, available at www.lakome.com/07-11-2011-9780/.

⁵² Yassine, *Al-Adl: Al-Islamiyun wal-Hukm* [Justice: Islamists and Power], p.36.

⁵³ "On the reasons for calling for a pact," [Unpublished document].

⁵⁴ The reference here is to the last speech made by Ben Ali on Thursday, 13th January 2011, before he fled Tunisia.

⁵⁵ "On the reasons for calling for a pact," [Unpublished document]

⁵⁶ See, for example, Gene Sharp, *From Dictatorship to Democracy: A Conceptual Framework for Liberation*, 4th ed., pp.5-7.

⁵⁷ *Hiwar ma`a al-Fudala ad-Dimuqratiyyin* [Dialogue with the Honourable Democrats] p.18.

⁵⁸ *Winning the Modern World for Islam*, p.165.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p.155.

⁶⁰ *Shura wa ad-Dimuqratiyya* [Shura and Democracy] p.270 and p.347.

⁶¹ Ibid., pp.53-54.

⁶² Yassine, *Al-Adl: Al-Islamiyun wal-Hukm* [Justice: Islamists and Power], p.682.

⁶³ *Hiwar ma`a al-Fudala ad-Dimuqratiyyin* [Dialogue with the Honourable Democrats] p.6.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ *Shura wa ad-Dimuqratiyya* [Shura and Democracy], p.347.

⁶⁶ E.C.S. Wade and A.W. Bradley, *Constitutional Law and Administrative Law* (London and New York: Longman Group, 1993), p.4.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.5.

⁶⁸ Some scholars adopt another classification which only differs in form but not in content. They speak of two modes of constitution-making: one is defined as "theocratic" and the other, "democratic". The "granted" [*octroyee*] and the "contractual" constitutions fall under the former category; the methods using the "constituent assembly" and the "constitutional referendum" fall under the latter category. See M'hamad Malki, *Al-Qanun ad-Dusturi wa al-Mu`assassat as-*

Siyassiya, 3rd ed. [Constitutional Law and Political Institutions] (Marrakech: Dar Walili, 1996), vol.1, pp.111-120.

⁶⁹ Mustafa Ben Hamza, "Harakat ar-Ridda: Uslub Harb am Huriyatu Fikr" [Apostasy movement: A mode of warfare or freedom of thought], published on Friday, 26th April 2013, available at: <http://hespress.com/orbites/77827.html> . See also Abd ar-Rahman Allal, "Al-Islah ad-Dusturi bil-Maghreb byna al-Mashru' ad-Dusturi lisanat 1908 wa Dustur 1996," [Constitutional Reform in Morocco between the Draft Constitution of 1908 and the Constitution of 1996] in *Wijhatu Nadhar* [A Point of View], no 47, Winter 2010.

⁷⁰ Ellen Lust-Okar, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World: Incumbents, Opponents and Institutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.47

⁷¹ Wilfrid Knapp, *North West Africa: A Political and Economic Survey*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p.288. Munson makes the same point saying that the constitution was "tailored to Hassan's specifications." See Henry Munson, *Religion and Power in Morocco*, p.127.

⁷² Pennell, *Morocco since 1830*, p.321. For Lise Storm, despite some constitutional amendments, the constitutional progress in this period "is in many cases more cosmetic than profound..." See Lise Storm, *Democratization in Morocco: The Political Elite and Struggles for Power in the Post-Independence State*, p.147.

⁷³ Octave Marais, "The Ruling Class in Morocco," in *Man, State, and Society in the Contemporary Maghrib*, p.187.

⁷⁴ Dale Eickelman, "Re-imagining Religion and Politics: Moroccan Elections in the 1990s," in *Islamism and Secularism in North Africa*, ed. by John Ruedy (London: Macmillan Press, 1994), p.255.

⁷⁵ According to Freedom House, which compiles an annual report on the status of political rights and civil liberties, Morocco is classified among the countries regarded as "Partly Free" and where press status is "Not Free". See Freedom House, *Country Report: Morocco, 2011*, available at: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2011/morocco>. Concerning corruption, Morocco was ranked 91 out of 177 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2013 Corruption Perceptions Index. See <http://www.transparency.org> .

⁷⁶ Paul Silverstein, "Weighing Morocco's New Constitution," *Middle East Research and Information Project*, published on 5th July 2011, available at: <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero070511>.

⁷⁷ Aidan Lewis, "Why Has Morocco's King Survived the Arab Spring?" *BBC News Middle East*, 24th November 2011, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-15856989>.

⁷⁸ George A. Bermann and Etienne Picard, eds., *Introduction to French Law* (The Netherlands: Kluwer Law International, 2008), p.19.

⁷⁹ *Winning the Modern World for Islam*, p.155.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*, p.59.

⁸² *Winning the Modern World for Islam*, p.155.

⁸³ Discussion with an MGC, 20th August 2012.

⁸⁴ See, for example, *Attitudes of al-Adl wal-Ihsan through its Spokesman Fath-Allah Arsalan*, p.30.

⁸⁵ *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*, p.64.

⁸⁶ *Winning the Modern World for Islam*, p.156.

⁸⁷ Moroccan researcher Younes Barada demonstrates how the opposition parties have been transformed "into political numbers with no political capital." Quoted in Driss Jandari, "The Political Party Experience in Morocco: Obscurity and Obfuscation," (Doha: Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, April 2012), p.18.

⁸⁸ Discussion with a senior member of PJD, now serving as minister in the government headed by his party.

⁸⁹ This is the core of the argument held by *at-Tawhid wal-Islah* [Unity and Reform] and its political wing *Hizb al-Adala wa at-Tanmiya* [Party for Justice and Development, PJD], leading the current government in Morocco. See, for instance, Mohamed El-Hamdawi [the current president of *at-Tawhid wal-Islah*], “Beina at-Taghyir al-Jidhri wal-Bina` at-Tarakumi,” [Between Radical Change and Cumulative Construction], published in *at-Tajdid* newspaper on 26th Feb.2010.

⁹⁰ See, for example, Mohamed Yatim, “Mohamed Yatim yunakishu Nadia Yassine and *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*,” [Mohamed Yatim Discusses Nadia Yassine’s Views and *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*], published in *at-Tajdid* newspaper on 15th June 2005; and Abd-Ali Majdoub, “Hinama Yusbihi al-Ijtihad as-Siyassi Mukadassan!! (2)” [When Political *Ijtihad* Becomes Sacred!!], published on 18th January 2013, available at: <http://www.hespress.com/writers/70575.html>.

⁹¹ *Le Journal Hebdomadaire*, 12th Feb. 2005, quoted in Francesco Cavatorta, “Civil Society, Islamism and Democratisation: The Case of Morocco”. The movement members deny such an allegation in numerous interviews, regarding it as part of a smear campaign against *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*. See for example two recent interviews by *Hespress*, a widely followed Website, of Abdellah Chibani and Omar Aharchane, both members of the Secretariat-General of the Political Section of the movement, on 27th September 2012, available at: <http://www.hespress.com/politique/64559.html>, and the second on 16th October 2012, available at: <http://www.hespress.com/interviews/63371.html>, both last accessed 21st October 2012.

⁹² Upon the withdrawal of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* from the 20 February movement, many articles appeared in the newspapers and the social media criticizing Yassine and his group. See, for instance, Ali Anuzla, “Taraju’ al-Jama’a,” [The Withdrawal of al-Jama’a], published on Monday, 19th December 2011, available at: <http://www.lakome.com>.

⁹³ *Mémoire, à qui de droit* [Memorandum: To Whom It May Concern], p.31.

⁹⁴ *Political Ascent: Contemporary Islamic Movements in North Africa*, p.235.

Chapter 8

¹ After about 10 years of house arrest, Sheikh Yassine held the first press conference on Saturday, 20th May 2000. The full text of this conference is available at: www.yassine.net.

² Abdessalam Yassine, *islamiser la modernité* (n.p.: al-ofk impressions, 1998), p.302.

³ Abdessalam Yassine, *La révolution à l’heure de l’islam* (France: Imprimerie Carlo Descamps, 1979 ; reprint, 1990), p.14.

⁴ Like Sheikh Hassan al-Banna (1906 – 1949), the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood; Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi (born in 1926), an Egyptian scholar who has published more than 120 books and his programme, *ash-Shari’ah wa al-Hayah* [Shari’ah and life], broadcast on Al Jazeera has an estimated audience of about 60 million worldwide (for more detail, see “*As-Sira at-Tafsiliya lil Qaradawi*,” available at: <http://www.qaradawi.net/life/9/973-2011-09-0414-39-33.html>); Sheikh Sa’id Hawwa, a Syrian Islamic thinker and activist and a prolific writer (d.1989); and many others.

⁵ *Winning the Modern World for Islam*, p.155.

⁶ See, for example, *Aims and Objectives of Islamic Education*, where a number of definitions are offered; the book is edited by Syed Muhammad al-Naquist al-Attas (Sevenoaks: Hodder and Stoughton; Jeddah: King Abdulaziz University, 1979).

⁷ Tawfiq Bouachrine, a Moroccan journalist and the editor and director of *Akhbar Al Yawm* newspaper, describes *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* in one of his articles as “a modern Zawiya.” See Tawfiq Bouachrine, “Wasiyat Abdessalam Yassine” [The Last Testament of Abdessalam Yassine], published on 14th December 2012, available at: <http://www.maghress.com/febrayer/12939>.

⁸ Please refer to the section dealing with the concept of *ihsan* in Chapter 4.

⁹ See his book, *Al-Ihsan*, vol.1, pp.17-74.

¹⁰ This is one of the ideas that are recurrent in Yassine's writings. See for example his book, *Nadharat fil al-Fikh wat-Tarikh* [Notes on Jurisprudence and History].

¹¹ *Sahih Muslim*, the Book of Faith [Kitab al-Iman], Chapter [Bab] 12: Clarifying the number of branches of faith, the best and the least of them, the virtue of modesty and the fact that it is part of faith, vol.2, pp.3-6.

¹² For a summary of these virtues, see *Al-Jama'a*, no.7, *Muharam, Safar, Rabi'l*, 1401 A.H [Nov., Dec., and Jan. 1980].

¹³ Abdessalam Yassine, *Al-Islam Ghadan* [Islam Tomorrow] (Casablanca: Matabi' an-Najah, 1973), p. 600.

¹⁴ Abdessalam Yassine, *Hiwar ma'a al-Fudal' ad-Dimocratyiyin* [Dialogue with the Honourable Democrats] (Casablanca: Matbu'at al-ofok, 1994), p.11.

¹⁵ *La révolution à l'heure de l'islam*, p.26.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.25.

¹⁸ *Al-Minhaj an-Nabawi: Tarbiyatan wa Tandhiman was Zahfan*, 3rd ed. [The Prophetic Method: Socialization, Organization and Action], p.292.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.59.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.271.

²¹ Imam Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Isma'il, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Kitab fada'il al-Quran 66, Bab 6: ta'lif al-Quran [Book of the virtues of the Quran] (Beirut: Dar Subh, 2003), vol.3, p.339, *hadith* no.4993.

²² *Ibid.*, p.350.

²³ Imam Ahmad, *Al-Musnad*, vol. 9, p.127, *hadith* no. 23548.

²⁴ *Al-Minhaj an-Nabawi: Tarbiyatan wa Tandhiman was Zahfan*, 3rd ed. [The Prophetic Method: Socialization, Organization and Action], p.59.

²⁵ *La révolution à l'heure de l'islam*, p.177. It should be noted here that though "Sheikh" or "Arif billah" is believed to have a high level of moral and spiritual perfection, it does not mean they are infallible; only Prophets are. Yassine also notes that they are not on the same level or of the same type. See for more detail Yassine, *Al-Ihsan*, vol.1, pp.217-223.

²⁶ *Winning the Modern World for Islam*, p.110.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ See, for example, Yassine, *Al-Ihsan*, vol.1, p.210, p.218 and in various places in this as well in many of his other works.

²⁹ *La révolution à l'heure de l'islam*, p.180.

³⁰ Yassine, *Al-Minhaj an-Nabawi: Tarbiyatan wa Tandhiman was Zahfan*, 3rd ed. [The Prophetic Method: Socialization, Organization and Action], p.67.

³¹ *Quran*, sura 4, verses 97-98.

³² *La révolution à l'heure de l'islam*, p.28.

³³ Yassine, *Al-Minhaj an-Nabawi: Tarbiyatan wa Tandhiman was Zahfan*, 3rd ed. [The Prophetic Method: Socialization, Organization and Action], p.146.

³⁴ Al-Hakim, *Al-Mustadrak alaa as-Sahihain*, the Book of Faith, vol.1, p.45, *hadith* no.5 ; see also Sheikh Muhammad Naser ad-Din al-Albani, *asl-Silsilat as-Saheehah*, (Riyad: Maktaba al-Ma'arif, 1995), vol.4, p.113, *hadith* no.1585.

³⁵ Imam Ahmad, *Al-Musnad*, on the authority of Abu Hureyra, vol. 3, p.281, *hadith* no. 8718 and see also *Al-Mustadrak alaa as-Sahihain*, Kitab at-tawba wal-Inaba, Jadidu Imanakum [Renew your faith], vol.4, p.258, *hadith* no.7657.

³⁶ *La révolution à l'heure de l'islam*, p.103.

³⁷ *Winning the Modern World for Islam*, p. 110.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Kitab al-Iman, Bab 25: 'alamat al-Munafiq, vol.1, pp.19-20, *hadith* no.33.

⁴¹ Yassine, *Al-Minhaj an-Nabawi: Tarbiyatan wa Tandhiman was Zahfan*, 3rd ed. [The Prophetic Method: Socialization, Organization and Action], pp.165-169.

⁴² Ibid., p.61.

⁴³ Ibid., p.58.

⁴⁴ *La révolution à l'heure de l'islam*, p.181.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 182.

⁴⁶ Translated and slightly adapted from *Al-Minhaj an-Nabawi: Tarbiyatan wa Tandhiman was Zahfan*, 3rd ed. [The Prophetic Method: Socialization, Organization and Action], pp.58-59.

⁴⁷ Please note that all the information provided in these paragraphs is based on the movement's unpublished documents.

⁴⁸ *La révolution à l'heure de l'islam*, p.185.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.186.

⁵⁰ On its legitimacy, see, for example, Sheikh Wahba Mustafa az-Zuhayli, *Al-Fikh al-Islami wa Adillatuh* [Islamic Jurisprudence and its Proofs] (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 1984), vol. 2, pp.692-726.

⁵¹ *Al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, Education Committee, unpublished documents on [educational and spiritual meetings].

⁵² Basheer El Tom, "Education and Society," in *Education and Society in the Muslim World*, ed. Muhammad Wasiullah Khan (Sevenoaks: Hodder and Stoughton: King Abdulaziz University, 1981), p.53.

⁵³ Among the great mosques which became famous for their academic reputation are: the Sacred Mosque in Makkah, the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah, Al-Aqsa Mosque in Palestine, Al-Azhar Mosque in Egypt, Az-Zaytuna Mosque in Tunisia, and Al-Qarawiyyin Mosque in Morocco – the latter attracted many great scholars who studied and taught there like Ibn Khaldun (1332 - 1406), Ibn Al-Khatib (1313 – 1374), Al-Bitruji (ca. 1204), Ibn Harazim (d. 1235/6), Ibn Maymoun [Maimonides] (1135–1204), a great Jewish scholar, and, according to a popular tradition, Gerbert of Aurillac (946-1003), who would become Pope Sylvester II and who is credited with introducing the use of zero and Arabic numerals to Europe, also studied for some time at al-Qarawiyyin.

⁵⁴ See, for example, Muhammad ibn Mukarram ibn Ali ibn Ahmad ibn Manzur, *Lisān al-'Arab* [One of the best-known and most comprehensive dictionaries of the Arabic language].

⁵⁵ "Malikism in Morocco," available at: [www.http://www.dar-sirr.com/malikism.html](http://www.dar-sirr.com/malikism.html).

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Mustafa Abdessalam al-Mahmah, "The Ribats in Morocco and their Influence in the Spread of Knowledge and Tasawuf" in *Al-Mar'a al-Maghribiya wa at-Tasawuf fi al-Karn al-Hadi 'Ashar* [the Moroccan Woman and at-Tasawuf in the Eleventh Century] (Casablanca: Matab' Dar al-Kitab, 1978), p.44. The chapter has been translated by 'Aisha Bewley and is available at: <http://bewley.virtualave.net/ribat.html>.

⁵⁸ *La révolution à l'heure de l'islam*, p.185.

⁵⁹ Unpublished documents on [Educational and spiritual meetings].

⁶⁰ *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Kitab al-Iman, [the Book of Faith], Bab 43: Ad-din an-nasiha [Counselling is the core of religion], vol.1, pp.19-20, *hadith* nos.57&58.

⁶¹ Unpublished documents [Educational and spiritual meetings].

⁶² Please refer to Chapter 3 to see how these "units" are organized.

⁶³ Unpublished documents [Educational and spiritual meetings].

⁶⁴ In the first version of *Al-Minhaj an-Nabawi*, the *usra* was invited to meet three times a week, but in practice it used to meet only twice. See *Al-Minhaj an-Nabawi*, p.79.

⁶⁵ Unpublished documents [Educational and spiritual meetings].

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ *La révolution à l'heure de l'islam*, p.163.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p.8.

⁶⁹ *Winning the Modern World for Islam*, p.155.

Chapter 9

¹ See Maddy-Weitzman, "Islamism, Moroccan-Style: the Ideas of Sheikh Yassine," *Middle East Quarterly*, vol.10, no.1 (2003) and see also Michael Willis, "Justice and Development or Justice and Spirituality? The Challenge of Morocco's Non-violent Islamist Movements," in *The Maghrib in the New Century: Identity, Religion, and Politics*, p.156.

² Euben, p. 156.

³ Many analysts have made this remark. See, for example, John O. Voll, *Islam: Continuity and Change in the Modern World*, 2nd ed., p.379.

⁴ Euben, p. 6.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., p.7.

⁷ Ibid., p.15.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., p.16.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.42.

¹¹ On the importance of Islam in the Arab world and how it differs from religion in Western societies, see Michael C. Hudson, *Arab Politics: The Search for Legitimacy*, p.52.

¹² Malika Zeghal, for example, claims in her book, *Islamism in Morocco*, that *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* "had a structure that resembled that of a Sufi brotherhood." See p.93. Tawfiq Bouachrine, a Moroccan journalist and the editor and director of *Akhbar Al Yawm* newspaper, describes *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* in one of his articles as "a modern Zawiya." See Tawfiq Bouachrine, "Wasiyat Abdessalam Yassine" [The Last Testament of Abdessalam Yassine], published on 14th December 2012, available at: <http://www.maghress.com/febrayer/12939>.

¹³ It would be enough to consult any of the collections of *hadiths* (sayings, acts and tacit approvals of Prophet Muhammad) to have an idea about the importance of this Islamic principle. See, for example, Imam Abdu Al-Azhim Al-Mundiri, *At-Tarhib wat-Tarhib* [Encouragement and Warnings] (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-'asriya, n.d.), vol.3, pp.223-233.

¹⁴ Zeghal, p.93.

¹⁵ Euben, p. 155.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ In a letter to Francois Burgat on 21st March 1992, Yassine wrote: "C'est la faute d'un dérèglement historique et d'une dégradation appauvrissante de l'interprétation de la loi si la femme musulmane subit le joug insupportable que les traditions sociales ont fini par lui faire accepter." [Unpublished manuscript].

¹⁸ In his letter to King Mohamed VI, Yassine says that if the king takes the necessary measures for reform, Morocco could move towards "genuine democracy [...] the only way out of the dark absolutism." Please refer to Chapter 5 for more detail.

¹⁹ Lise Storm, p. 185.

²⁰ Aziz al-Azmeh, *Islams and Modernities*, quoted in Euben, p.9.

²¹ See Michael Willis, "Justice and Development or Justice and Spirituality? The Challenge of Morocco's Non-violent Islamist Movements," pp. 164-165.

²² Ibid.

²³ Abdelwahab El-Affendi, *Turabi's Revolution: Islam and Power in Sudan* (London: Grey Seal, 1991), p.4.

²⁴ Concerning this point, Willis notes that "as a personality, Yassine exercises powerful appeal to those both inside and outside the movement. A substantial part of this appeal is due to Yassine's consistent refusal to bow to pressures from the regime to cease his criticism of the monarchy and the existing political order and his complete unwillingness to be co-opted." See Willis, p. 164.

²⁵ Francesco Cavatorta, "Civil Society, Islamism and Democratisation: The Case of Morocco," *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol.44, no.2 (June 2006), p. 214.

²⁶ See, for instance, *Shura wa ad-Dimuqratiyya* [Shura and Democracy], pp.53-54.

²⁷ Note that all the information, here and elsewhere in this study, is gleaned from reliable sources: published and unpublished texts and/ or discussions with top members of the movement.

²⁸ Said ibn Muhammad Halim, *Jama'at al-Adl wal-Ihsan: Qira'a fi al-Khafiya al-Fikriya* [Jama'at al-Adl wal-Ihsan: A reading of its Intellectual Background] (Fez: Info-Print, 2007), p.34.

²⁹ Indeed, one senior member is quoted as saying, "We do not lead a group of sheep." See Cavatorta, "Civil Society, Islamism and Democratisation: The Case of Morocco," p.214.

³⁰ See Diaa Rashwan, ed. *The spectrum of Islamist Movements* (Berlin : Hans Schiler Verlag, 2007), p.169.

³¹ In a recent interview with *Akhbar al-Yawm* newspaper, Mohamed Darif, a Moroccan researcher who has written a lot on Moroccan Islamist movements, says, "The strength of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* lies in its organization and those who believed that the movement would disappear after Yassine's death were wrong." Then he adds that "the movement was powerful because of its organization and it will stay so [translation mine]." See the complete interview in *Akhbar al-Yawm* newspaper, Issue 1154, 31st August 2013.

³² See Chapter 3, where this point is discussed.

³³ *Political Ascent: Contemporary Islamic Movements in North Africa*, p.195.

³⁴ A number of these questions are discussed in the first issues of *Al-Jama'a Journal*, published between February 1979 and May 1983 and later on in *Al-Minhaj an-Nabawi: Tarbiyatan wa Tandhiman was Zahfan*, 3rd ed. [*The Prophetic Method: Socialization, Organization and Action*] and other works by Yassine.

³⁵ To know more about certain issues upon which Moroccan Islamist differ, it may be helpful to refer to Mohamed Darif, *Al-Islam as-Siyasi fi al-Maghrib: Muqaraba watha'iqiya* [Political Islam in Morocco: A Documentary Approach].

³⁶ Bouachrine, journalist and editor of *Akhbar al-Yawm* newspaper, notes that what should be credited to Yassine and his group is that despite what they had suffered at the hands of the regime for nearly 33 years, they remained steadfast in their commitment to these founding principles, i.e. "the 3 Nos". See Tawfiq Bouachrine, "Wasiyat Abdessalam Yassine" [The Last Testament of Abdessalam Yassine], published on 14th December 2012, available at: <http://www.maghress.com/febrayer/12939>.

³⁷ Note that the movement leadership is still reticent to reveal the numbers of their group for security reasons. Thus, the numbers that are found in some articles are mere estimates.

³⁸ See, for example, Henri Lauziere, "Post-Islamism and the Religious Discourse of Abdessalam Yassine," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol.37, no.2 (May, 2005), p. 251.

³⁹ I have heard from many members that attending those meetings was decisive in their ultimate decision to join the movement.

⁴⁰ These issues are tackled in most if not all of Yassine's books. See, for example, *Al-Minhaj an-Nabawi: Tarbiyatan wa Tandhiman was Zahfan*, 3rd ed. [*The Prophetic Method: Socialization, Organization and Action*], pp.244-246.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.289.

⁴² To be fair all moderate Islamist groups in Morocco have the same attitude towards society; however, it is to the credit of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* that it was able to elaborate, in an earlier stage, a coherent view based on Islamic texts, promoting this conciliatory approach.

⁴³ Quoted in Myriam Francois-Cerrah, "What Does Abdessalam Yassine's Death Mean for Morocco," Thursday, 20th December 2012, available at:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/dec/20/abdessalam-yassine-death-morocco>.

⁴⁴ Ibid. See also Michael Willis, "Justice and Development or Justice and Spirituality? The Challenge of Morocco's Non-violent Islamist Movements, p.165.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Bouachrine argues that "it would be inconceivable for Morocco to achieve a true democratic transition without integrating Yassine's group into a political party and allowing it to participate in elections, parliament and, why not, in government [translation mine]." See Tawfiq Bouachrine, "*Al-Adl wal-Ihsan* ma ba'da al-Murshid" [*Al-Adl wal-Ihsan* after the Guide's death], published on 16th December 2012, available at: <http://www.hespress.com/writers/68273.html>

⁴⁸ See David Alexander Bienert, "The Concept of *jihad* in the Writings of Abdessalam Yassine," MA Thesis, Worcester College, University of Oxford, UK, (2007), available at:

<http://www.users.ox.ac.uk/~metheses/Bienert%20Thesis.pdf> (accessed on 21st October 2013).

⁴⁹ El-Affendi, *Turabi's Revolution: Islam and Power in Sudan*, p.186.

⁵⁰ The history of Almoravids and Almohads may be a good illustration of this point. They were initially reform movements before they converted into family-based monarchies. For more details, see Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.304-308.

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